



Returned volunteers' perceptions on their international voluntary work experience and its impact on their lives

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoitus oli tutkia palanneiden vapaaehtoisten käsityksiä heidän kansainvälisestä vapaaehtoistyökokemuksestaan. Opinnäytetyön painopisteenä olivat kansainvälisen vapaaehtoistyön pitkäaikaiset vaikutukset ja muutokset vapaaehtoisten elämissä. Opinnäytetyön tutkimuskysymykset olivat ”miten palanneet vapaaehtoiset käsittävät kansainvälisen vapaaehtoistyökokemuksensa?” ja ”miten palanneet vapaaehtoiset käsittävät kansainvälisen vapaaehtoistyökokemuksensa vaikuttaneen elämiinsä?”. Opinnäytetyö tehtiin osana Laurea Otaniemen Thesis Process Pilot Projectia kansalaisjärjestö Maailmanvaihdon, jolla on vuosikymmenten kokemus kansainvälisestä vapaaehtoistyöstä. Opinnäytetyössä käytettiin laadullisia tutkimusmenetelmiä, haastatteluja aineiston keruuseen ja sisällön analyysia niiden analysointiin. Osallistujat olivat kuusi Maailmanvaihdon kautta kansainväliseen vapaaehtoistyöhön osallistunutta ja niiden kautta ulkomailla ollutta suomalaista. Tutkimuksen löydökset osoittivat, että palanneet vapaaehtoiset kokivat vapaaehtoistyöjaksonsa kokonaisuudessaan myönteisesti. Vapaaehtoiset kokivat saaneensa työkokemusta, muodostaneensa kansainvälisiä sosiaalisia kontakteja ja ihmissuhteita ja saaneensa erilaisia oppimiskokemuksia, jotka liittyivät heidän elinympäristönsä yhteisölliseen ja kulttuurienväliseen puitteeseen. Löydökset osoittivat myös, että palanneet vapaaehtoiset uskoivat vapaaehtoistyön puitteiden ja omien piirteidensä vaikuttavan oppimiskokemusten muodostumiseen. Löydöksiin perustuen vapaaehtoisten myönteisten oppimiskokemusten saavuttamiseksi tulee panostaa vapaaehtoisen vapaaehtoistyöpaikkaan sijoittamiseen hakuprosessin aikana.

Asiasanat: kansainvälinen vapaaehtoistyö, non-formaali oppiminen, sosiaalinen pääoma, aktiivinen kansalaisuus

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The purpose of this Bachelor's thesis was to discover the perceptions of returned volunteers on their international voluntary work experience. The focus was particularly on the long-term impact and changes in the returned volunteers' lives beyond the international volunteering period. The research questions of this study were "how returned volunteers perceive their international voluntary work experience?" and "how returned volunteers perceive their international voluntary work experience has impacted their lives?". The thesis was done under Thesis Process Pilot Project of Laurea Otaniemi and for the working-life partner MaaIlmanvaihto - International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE) Finland, a non-profit civil organization with long-term experience in international volunteering. The study was qualitative, using interviews for data collection and content analysis for data analysis. The participants were six Finns who had participated to an international voluntary work programme abroad via MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland. The findings showed that the returned volunteers perceived their overall experience positively. The returned volunteers considered to gain work experience, form international social contacts and relationships and undergo a number of learning experiences relating to the communal and intercultural framework they were living in. The findings also showed that the returned volunteers considered their personal as well as the framework attributes to affect their learning experiences. The findings reflect that in order to guarantee the volunteers' positive learning experiences, attention should be paid in matching the right volunteer with the right voluntary placement during the application process.

Keywords: international voluntary work, non-formal learning, social capital, active citizenship

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, international voluntary service has grown significantly in number and form both globally and in Finland (Lager, Laihiala & Kontinen 2009, 9-10, Sherraden, Stringham, Sow & McBride 2006, 1-2). On one hand, the importance of experience (Raninen, Raninen, Toni & Tornaesus 2008, 6) and popularity of gap years have increased the interest and possibilities especially for young people to internationalize, though increased short-term contracts in working life have also enabled participation to international voluntary work by other age groups (Lager et al 2009, 13). On the other hand, international civil organizations' growing role as promoters of global peace and understanding offers an option for those interested in international and intercultural encounters which other instances do not provide (Kaldor 2003 & Sherraden et al 2006 in Sherraden et al 2006, 3, McBride, Lough & Sherraden 2010, 1, Raninen et al 2008, 32). Globalisation has contributed a lot to international voluntary work in terms of increased knowledge and awareness about other countries, development of information technology, more accessible travelling and the increase of "voluntourism", the combination of voluntary work with (holiday) travelling (Lager et al 2009, 10). Despite of increased access and participation to volunteering abroad, relatively little is known about international voluntary work or its effects (Lewis 2006, 1, McBride et al 2010, 1). In Finland, international voluntary work appears to be a little studied theme, knowledge of which is mainly tacit among those involved in its activities. Various authors view, however, that the role of civil organisations and volunteering is increasing and gaining importance globally (Helander & Laaksonen 1999, 69-70, Rifkin 1997, 273-276 in Harju 2003, 35, 38-39).

The purpose of this study was to discover the impact international voluntary work has on the volunteers' lives as perceived by the volunteers themselves. The working life partner of this study was MaaIlmanvaihto - Intercultural Youth Exchange (ICYE) Finland, a nongovernmental grassroots organization with long-term experience in international voluntary work. The study's aim was to provide its working-life partner with information on their overseas activities which goes beyond feedback questionnaires, tacit knowledge and gut feeling for further development of their activities. The aim of this study was also to give voice to the individual experiences and perceptions of the volunteers, something that currently seen missing in voluntary work research (Nylund & Yeung 2005, 14, 22). The maturity test of this thesis will be published as an article in MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's MaaIlmanVaihtoa - Volunteers' voices magazine. Overall this thesis is, although being a small-scale study, a contribution to studies in international voluntary work and voluntary work impact. The interest towards the topic has also risen from the author's personal background and professional interests concerning (international) voluntary work.

2 BACKGROUND OF THE THESIS

2.1 Own interest in the topic

The decision to do a thesis on international voluntary work was initiated by the author's interest in the topic. Having participated to international voluntary work for the first time in 2004 (a workcamp in Germany), the involvement in both national and international volunteering has continued for years. This involvement has enabled to witness the significant role volunteerism can have in contributing to the lives of the people and communities involved. Alongside others (Helander & Laaksonen 1999, 69-70, Rifkin 1997, 273-276 in Harju 2003, 35, 38-39, Kaldor 2003 & Sherraden et al 2006 in Sherraden et al 2006, 3) I view this role to be enforced in the future with the role of civil organisations and volunteering gaining importance globally and their role in promoting internationalism and multiculturalism increasing. Therefore, at the brink of European Year of Volunteering 2011, it felt apt to focus on a form of voluntary work to which particularly young Finns already participate to but which is still relatively unknown. Alongside others (e.g. Hofmann 2002, 13), there is also recognition that voluntary work is often connected to social field and used as a tool alongside governmental social work to address societal issues, whether this is intended by its organisers, participants or social welfare professionals. Therefore, from a social services student's perspective, understanding voluntary work is important, whether this voluntary work is international or not, in Finland or abroad. Empowered by the Thesis Process Pilot Project of Laurea Otaniemi, under which this thesis was done, it was possible to more freely approach a working life partner with a mutually interesting topic, enabling also development of knowledge relevant to the author's vocational future.

2.2 The working life partner: Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland

The working life partner of this Bachelor's thesis was Maailmanvaihto - International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE) Finland (Maailmanvaihto ry). Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland is a grass-roots civil organization with long-term experience in sending and hosting international volunteers, currently approximately 60 annually (both sending and hosting), having partner organizations in over 30 countries across the world. Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland is the Finnish branch of International Cultural Youth Exchange, an international network of organizations involved in international voluntary work with roots in the aftermath of World War II. At that time short for International Christian Youth Exchange (Kansainvälinen Kristillinen Nuorisovaihto Ry), Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland was founded in 1958. The organisation started off as an international student exchange organization with strong ties to the church but has since developed into a politically and religiously independent organization involved only in international voluntary work. In addition to the international volunteer work programmes, Maailman-

vaihto - ICYE Finland's activities include organizing camps and seminars for international volunteers in Finland, participation to international seminars abroad and promotion of international voluntary work for prospective volunteers. Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland publishes also a magazine, MaailmanVaihtoa - Volunteers' voices, which is published both in paper and online version. Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's activities are currently organized by three paid staff members and a number of volunteers and funded by participation fees, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland¹ (Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland). Despite of the author's volunteering background, there was no prior involvement with Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland and little knowledge about them as an organisation, which was considered mutually beneficial for this thesis.

It was quickly established with Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's Secretary General Anni Koskela that there was a mutual interest on the volunteers' international voluntary work experiences, particularly from the perspective of how they impact or change the volunteers' lives. The interest was specifically on those Finns who had participated to a volunteer work programme abroad and the changes within the returned volunteers and their lives beyond the actual voluntary work period, as perceived and experienced by the volunteers themselves. Currently this knowledge on the international voluntary work experience and its impact within Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland is considered to be tacit and based on a gut feeling, which makes it difficult to verbalize for example to prospective international volunteers. The purpose of this thesis was thus to provide Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland information on their overseas activities which goes beyond tacit knowledge and gut feeling and which can be used as a reference point to future volunteers or anyone else interested in the topic. In preliminary discussions one possibility for this reference point was an article in Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's MaailmanVaihtoa - Volunteers' voices magazine, of which distribution reaches the organisation's returned and current overseas volunteers, volunteer support persons, host families and voluntary work placements within Finland as well as prospective volunteers in events such as World Village Festival or Studia. Through the magazine's distribution the article could, somewhat symbolically, also give thanks and recognition to volunteers, one of the general aims of European Year of Volunteering 2011 (European Year of Volunteering 2011) and the author of this thesis.

2.3 Previous studies

In addition to the working life partner's and author's interest to the theme, it is important to note that previous studies, and lack thereof, also contributed to the making of this study. In Finland international voluntary work, outside of numerous unpublished studies and feedback

¹ European Voluntary Service, one of two international voluntary work programmes Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's volunteers can participate to, is funded by the European Union.

questionnaires, is a rather understudied theme. This can be explained with international voluntary work's role in the Finnish volunteering scheme; with approximately one percent of registered civil organizations involved in international issues, it represents a minority (Lager et al 2009, 7). Finland is a country where third sector activities, such as voluntary work, can be seen as having the role of being an extension of a relatively strong public sector and its services. With this in mind, the traditionally studied themes of volunteer motives and commitment as well as the attitudes towards voluntary work (e.g. Lager et al 2009, Yeung 2002) in Finland becomes understandable; when activities depend on volunteers, attracting and maintaining long-term volunteers becomes the aim (Mykkänen-Hänninen 2007, 9, 20). Any studies on the topic on international volunteering, however, have been made in Finland. Bachelor theses by Keränen (2008) and Ikonen & Katavisto (2010) have been made on the motives and experiences of volunteers on international voluntary workcamps. Riihimäki has conducted a small-scale qualitative study on the experiences of returned volunteers of short-term European Voluntary Service (2010). Viljanen has examined the role of voluntourism in international voluntary work in both her Bachelor and Master's theses (2007 & 2008). Tennilä has analyzed short-term European Voluntary Service as a programme tool for 'disadvantaged' youth in her Master's thesis (2008).

The most relevant studies for this thesis have been conducted abroad. In United Kingdom, nongovernmental organization VSO together with Institute for Volunteering Research has reviewed the impacts of international voluntary work for both the volunteer and on the wider community (Machin 2008). Thomas has conducted a study on the experiences of the transferability of the learnt skills during international voluntary service by interviewing returned volunteers, their employers and experts (2001). Iannone, Procter & Skrypnik have studied the learning processes that take place during European Voluntary Service (2008). In United States, a group of researches affiliated with the Center for Social Development in George Warren Brown School of Social Work conducted a study in 2009 with the aim of developing The International Volunteering Impacts Survey (IVIS), a survey tool to assess the impacts of international voluntary work on the returned volunteers. Whilst developing IVIS, the researches reviewed numerous studies (more than 65) addressing international voluntary work's impact. Ultimately the research group came up with five main outcome categories, which were tested on prospective, returned and non-volunteers (Lough, McBride & Sherraden 2009). In 2010 the same research group conducted a quasi-experimental study using the same survey tool on returned and non-volunteers, finding international voluntary work impacting for example on increased international awareness, international social capital and international career intentions (McBride et al 2010).

The previous studies on international as well as national voluntary work have been central to the formation, focus and development of this study. The limited amount of studies on inter-

national voluntary work and the novelty of these studies have led to the realization that international voluntary work in general ought to be more studied. In addition, the lesser focus on volunteer level impact of voluntary work has in its own accord affected the initial interest to focus on that particular aspect of international voluntary work. Studies on international voluntary service are also in general quantitative, themed surveys or discourse analyses in which individual level perspectives seldom get heard in their full volume. All of these aspects contributed to the decision to do a qualitative study with individual level perceptions and experiences on international voluntary work. In addition to affecting the focus and method of this study, previous studies have also provided a valuable resource for this study. As international voluntary work is a relatively new phenomenon, not much literature exists on it. As a form of voluntary work it also can differ greatly from other forms of voluntary work (such as peer support volunteering), so that literature on these can be utilized only up to an extent. With their direct relatedness to the studied theme, in particular the international studies and articles on international voluntary work have been much utilized in forming the theoretical framework of this study.

3 DEFINING INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY WORK

International voluntary work's origins date back to the nineteenth and twentieth century missionary work and international freedom and solidarity movements (Lager et al 2009, 10, Lewis 2006, 1-2, Rosenstock-Huessy 1978 in Sherraden et al 2006, 2). As an activity affected by societal circumstances and need, the most central period for international voluntary work is considered to be the reconstruction of Europe after the world wars; this marks also Finland's involvement in international volunteering. The after-build of Europe generated such organizations as Service Civil International and International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE), who got involved in international voluntary workcamps and student exchanges, and soon developed national branches in Finland. The aim of these organisations was beyond the necessary societal rebuild in the increased understanding and peace between the former enemies. International solidarity and interest towards intercultural exchanges increased Finns' participation in the upcoming decades, also involving developing countries. (Lager et al 2009, 14-15)

In present day, forms of international volunteering vary in form and length. As established in the previous chapter, the various theses on international volunteering originate from studies of tourism, pedagogy and civic activities and youth work, showcasing well that international voluntary work does not distinctively fall under one field of science. Due to the variety of international voluntary work, much like with national volunteering, no one definition exists for it; the words 'voluntary work', 'voluntary service', 'voluntary action' and 'volunteering' already indicate the diversity and different connotations that belong to the same umbrella of

activities². The purpose of this chapter with all of its sub-chapters is to give a thorough description of the type of international voluntary work this study focuses on, thus also providing theoretical framework for this study.

Sherraden, Lough & McBride define international voluntary work as an organized period in an individual's life during which he or she participates in voluntary action in another country with the aim of contributing to its community and society (2008, in McBride et al 2010, 1). This definition suits this thesis because it emphasizes the volunteer's activities taking place abroad, as opposed to volunteering in the volunteer's permanent country of residence or volunteering on a virtual level, both of which contexts can also be international (Nylund & Yeung 2005, 30). The aforementioned definition also suits this thesis because it emphasizes voluntary work being organized and aiming to benefit the surrounding society. It is important to note that the participants of this study have participated in an organized voluntary work programme via a civil organization, not for example travelled to another country as a part of self-organized holiday or to help their relative. By excluding so-called forth sector volunteering, in which the extent of the voluntary contribution is only to the immediate social circle (i.e. friends and family) of the volunteer and which international volunteering could also be, the definition of voluntary work in this study becomes synonymous with civic action, people's active, public (as opposed to private) action in society for a common benefit (Harju 2003, 9-13). In this Bachelor's thesis international voluntary work is understood as civil organization coordinated civic action and thus literature on civic action has been used as a resource in the theoretical framework of this study. The definition by Sherraden et al also fits this thesis because it emphasizes international voluntary work being voluntary, something the participants of this thesis have done out of their free will.

3.1 International voluntary work programmes

Volunteers of MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland can participate in international voluntary work abroad via two voluntary work programmes: ICYE volunteer programme and European Voluntary Service. ICYE volunteer work programme is MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's own international voluntary work programme enabling voluntary work in Asia, Oceania, Africa and Latin America. European Voluntary Service (EVS) is a sub-programme of European Union's Youth in Action³, coordinated in Finland by international mobility organization CIMO, enabling voluntary work in Europe and ETA-countries. Both programmes offer possibility to volunteer abroad

² The different terms for voluntary work are often used interchangeably and most authors recognize them as synonymous, though specific term can be chosen for connotation purposes (e.g. Harju 2003, Mykkänen-Hänninen 2007, Thomas 2001). In this study the terms are used synonymously, however international voluntary work is used most often because it is the term ICYE Finland refers their activities with.

³ Before 2007 European Voluntary Service was under a sub-programme called Youth Programme.

in an ICYE sister organization, and in the case of EVS also in other organizations, from six to 12 months; the focus of this thesis is thus on long-term international voluntary work. Eligible participants should be between 18 to 30 years of age, though upper age limit is flexible in some ICYE volunteer programme projects (Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland).

The ICYE volunteer work programme and European Voluntary Service include organized accommodation (usually in a host family, dormitory or joint apartment with other volunteers), insurance, training or seminars prior to, during and after volunteering period⁴ and a small monetary remuneration often referred to as “pocket money”. This challenges one of the most common definitions of voluntary work as an unpaid activity (e.g. Nylund & Yeung 2005, 15, Mykkänen-Hänninen 2007, 11), though the monetary remuneration that constitutes pocket money is not considered substantial or comparable to a regular pay. The voluntary work in these programmes, however, fulfil another criteria commonly linked to voluntary action, that of it being layman’s activity (e.g. Niemelä-Dufva 2003, Hakkarainen 2003, Hokkanen 2003 in Mykkänen-Hänninen 2007, 9). Though Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland emphasizes volunteers should have some level of English, have an open-mind and some level of maturity, there are no vocational prerequisites for participating in the two voluntary work programmes. This differentiates the international voluntary work of this study from humanitarian relief, developmental aid and other forms of international voluntary service, in which prior experience and professional expertise is essential. (Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland)

The voluntary work in the international volunteer programmes varies and can be connected for example to environmental issues or cultural promotion. Often, however, international voluntary work projects tend to be of social and educational nature, for example work in an orphanage, teaching in a school or work in an HIV-project (Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland). The projects are always voluntary work in and for the local community. The international volunteer programmes of this study are not volunteering for a private organization (private sector), nor organized by a governmental instance (public sector), but voluntary work in a civil organization (third sector) with non-profit (‘yleishyödyllinen’) cause. Civil organization is a network of people with some kind of organizational structure, common operational rules and norms and a common, not-for-profit cause that provides the ideological framework for the members’ activities (Harju 2003, 12). This makes international voluntary work, much like any volunteering, a cause-oriented and value-laden activity.

The general aim of Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland is to offer young volunteers new learning experiences and to increase intercultural and international understanding and global respon-

⁴ The pre-departure and return seminar of European Voluntary Service is organized by CIMO (Maailmanvaihto – ICYE Finland). Currently there is no seminar for volunteers on their return to Finland (CIMO).

sibility and justice (Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland). These aims can be also reflected in the European Commission coordinated European Voluntary Service's aims of solidarity, active (European) citizenship and mutual understanding and young people's development of intercultural skills (CIMO, European Commission). European Voluntary Service has also some own programme-related aims emphasizing international voluntary service as a programme tool for social strengthening and employability for young adults (CIMO, European Commission). Though the use of EVS as a tool for inclusion is perhaps more emphasized in the short-term European Voluntary Service, which Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland is not involved with, this can be seen also reflected in the long-term EVS. For example, people who are considered to have other possibilities for internationalization, such as students in higher education institutions involved with student exchange programmes and international practice placements, are generally not accepted to EVS. In addition, whereas participation to ICYE volunteer programme costs in-between 3 500€ and 4 300€ excluding travelling costs to and from the destination country, EVS has no participation fee and the overall cost to the volunteer is currently 10% of the travelling costs⁵ (Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland). The differences between the programmes predict differences in the socio-economic status and life situation of their participants, however both programmes were decided to be included in this thesis as they were considered similar enough in their principles and practices.

According to Amorim & Geudens, voluntary work can be seen having an idealistic or a pragmatic emphasis based on its aims (2002, 14-15). Idealistic voluntary work emphasizes voluntary work as societal participation and caring, and prioritizes its benefits to the volunteer project. Pragmatic voluntary work, then again, emphasizes voluntary work's benefits to the volunteer, for example in terms employability, learning experiences and overall self-development; from this perspective, Amorim & Geudens write, international voluntary work can be seen as a form of youth work (2002, 15). Though Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's aims can be seen having both idealistic and pragmatic traits by Amorim & Geudens' definition, offering learning experiences for a focus group of vocationally inexperienced youths implies a more pragmatic orientation. Pragmatic programme aims are aligned with increased self-serving motives from volunteers, which is considered characteristic of postmodern voluntary work (e.g. Sorri & Lähteenmaa in Harju 2003, 121-122, Mykkänen-Hänninen 2007, 24). This means that volunteering projects are chosen increasingly based on personal and professional interests and aspirations, an overall development linked to individualization and particularly to young Westerners, which international volunteers commonly are. Though various opinions exist on what the "right" motives to volunteer should be, several authors point out that voluntary work aims and individual level motives, the latter of which is not the focus of this study, can include simultaneously both altruistic and individualistic elements (Amorim & Geudens 2002, 15, Harju 2003, 122, Lager et al 2009, 10).

⁵ During the Youth Programme European Voluntary Service was totally cost-free for its participants.

3.2 Features of international voluntary work

As an activity, international voluntary work, regardless of its exact work content, is considered to entail certain features leading to certain outcomes, both for the individual and society. Intercultural competence, social capital and active citizenship are examples of concepts often connected to international volunteering, yet seldom construed. In the following sub-chapters these (central) concepts related to international voluntary work are looked upon as provided by theme-related literature, international studies, MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's international volunteer work programme aims and, admittedly, tacit knowledge. The aim is to further characterize and theorize international voluntary work as an activity.

3.2.1 International voluntary work as non-formal learning

Learning is a process where an individual acquires new knowledge (well-argued true beliefs) and skills (practical knowledge, competence and abilities) which lead to a change in his or her life (Sydänmaalakka 2000, 30, in Harju, 50). According to Engeström, "the aim of learning is an improved understanding and control of the surrounding reality" (1992, 178, in Harju, 50). Offering learning possibilities for young volunteers is one of the central aims of MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland (MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland).

The learning in international voluntary work activities is non-formal by nature. Non-formal learning refers to learning outside the formal education system (i.e. kindergartens, schools, institutions) and to learning which is not aimed at a degree or formal qualification. Non-formal and formal education can thus be seen emphasizing different aims: formal education emphasizes the outcome of learning (learning is measured), non-formal education the process of learning. Both non-formal and formal education can however overlap; formal education can have non-formal elements in it and non-formal education can be structured. Together non-formal and formal learning form individual's life-long learning which enables the development of personal and professional skills and knowledge. Life-long learning also emphasizes the individuality of one's learning process, the importance of all kinds of learning and the idea of learning taking place throughout a lifetime. (Harju 2003, 50-53)

A part of non-formal learning is unstructured, informal learning. Informal learning refers to every-day learning that can be very unintentional as well as unnoticed. Opinions, attitudes and values are good examples of informal learning because they are learnt as a "by-product" of many things, such as work, education and extra-curricular activities (Harju 2003, 52). Informal learning has also strongly to do with the development of tacit knowledge, the kind of knowledge which usually develops with experience but is difficult to put into words (Raninen et al 2008, 96).

Non-formal learning is represented in international voluntary work programmes for example in the training seminars pre-, mid-, and post-voluntary service, where volunteers are able to prepare for and receive practical knowledge on their overseas experience and discuss their thoughts, excitements and anxieties with their peers (Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland). Various studies, however, tend to highlight the more informal learning experiences of international voluntary work. Lough et al (2009), Machin (2008) and Thomas (2001) note that volunteers develop a host of skills and competences during their voluntary service. Though various skills are reported, the majority relates to interpersonal skills, such as cooperation, problem-solving, communication and leadership skills, adaptability and self-awareness. Thomas' study also indicates that informal learning in international voluntary work is not always entirely fortuitous, but there exist "career volunteers" to whom international voluntary work is a way to enhance the above-mentioned skills, which they believe to develop specifically via international voluntary service, in order to advance their career (2001, 21, 44). Also Raninen et al mention voluntary work can be a tool to develop professional skills as well as a tool to find out what one wants to do professionally (2008, 96, 113). Studies also indicate international voluntary work has the latter affect on volunteers, particularly in terms of their international career intentions (Lough et al 2009, McBride et al 2010). Moreover international voluntary work can also lead to employment, as civil organisations such as Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland are known to offer their volunteers further training possibilities, and in the event of a job vacancy, active volunteers are on the top of the list (Raninen et al 2008, 113).

3.2.2 International voluntary work as a social activity

As indicated by the previous chapter, many of the skills that are considered to develop in international voluntary work are connected to its social nature as an activity; Harju states that learning in civic action is a "social process" (2003, 55). This chapter focuses on two very interrelated aspects connected to international voluntary work's sociality, social capital and communality. Both concepts are generally linked to civic action and national and international voluntary work by various authors and (e.g. Harju 2003, Raninen et al 2008, Yeung 2002) and international voluntary work is reported to increase returned volunteers' social capital (McBride et al 2010).

Social capital is a term in social sciences referring to a form of capital different from, though interrelated to, monetary capital, physical capital (infrastructure, machinery) and human capital (individual's knowledge and skills) (Harju 2003, 61). Woolcock defines social capital as the norms and relations in the social structure of society. Coleman sees social capital as a resource which enables people to intentionally direct their activities towards their goals. Putnam views social capital as those elements in social structure which ease the interaction between the individual and the group, such as communication, reciprocity and trust. According

to Bourdieu, social capital is the sum of resources that an individual has based on his social networks (i.e. family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances) and the quality of these networks (the appreciation, status and role one has in the network, the depth of relationships in the network) (Raninen et al 2008, 37, Ruuskanen 2001, 21-26, 34 in Harju 2003, 61). Though social scientists define social capital slightly differently, they are referring to a resource in society, which is created by interaction among people and groups, which is generated by and generates such elements as trust, reciprocity and equality, which has both a structural (social networks) and relational (quality of the networks) element in it and which takes presence on an individual, communal and societal level (Ruuskanen 2001, 21-26, 34, Kajanoja & Simpura 2000, 13-23, OECD 2001, 41-42 in Harju 2003, 61, 64). When individuals and groups are in such interaction beyond national borders, one can refer to it as international social capital. A study by McBride et al shows that returned volunteers report significant growth in their social capital, which included personal and organizational contacts in other countries and the level of interaction with the contacts (2010, 2, 8).

Social capital is formed when people interact and socialize with one another and get to know each other; this is intrinsically present in international voluntary which regardless of its exact framework includes social interaction. The formation of social capital consists of various different ingredients which are created in pro-social behaviour. Those ingredients and elements include open communication, shared norms, understanding, reciprocity, trust, equality and respect. The same elements that are considered indicators of social capital also generate it. Of these elements trust is generally considered to be the most important for social capital formation. Trust is directly linked to the other elements of social capital; the level of trust between people affects their interaction, communication and respect towards one another. Without trust social networks function poorly, and the more control, hierarchies and rules groups have, the less social capital they produce. Therefore general trust, which focuses on people we do not know from before or who are different to us, has the most potential to build social capital. (Riihinen 2001, 17 in Harju 2003, 62-63)

At the core of social capital are social groups and communities. Community is a network of interaction in which its members have something in common; a group of people together in itself does not make it a community. Community's culture is based on its structure of values, which become visible in its members' actions, common habits and norms when the values are internalized. These customs make it easier for new members to socialize into the community (Perheentupa 57-59 in Harju 2003, 73). A socialized community member knows the community's customs and social expectations and can act according to them, to the point of these behaviours becoming automatic (Suomalainen Tietosanakirja 1990 in Harju 2003, 76). Communality and its socialization increase social capital. Therefore social capital is considered a characteristic of community (Harju 2003, 66).

The commonality in a community can be based on various things including location, kinship, background, interests, belief system or common activities such as work or hobbies (Lehtonen 1990, 15-17, 134 in Harju 2003, 70-71). Based on this, Lehtonen separates status, operational and symbolic communities (1990, 23-27, 33-34 in Harju 2003, 71). Status community is a community where one is born into based on socio-economic background, ethnicity or other similar, non-chosen traits. Operational communities are based on common, concrete action which is created by interaction among its members. Symbolic communities are created by shared beliefs and ideology which enforce a conscious feeling of inclusion and belonging. In addition, various authors separate taste and experience based communities characterized by shared interests and life style and consumer choices which reflect their membership; how the community spends their time together is emphasized over why they do it (Lash 1996, 219-221, Maffesoli 1993, 63 and Jurvansuu 2002, 22, in Harju 2003, 71- 72). The postmodern Western society is considered to be a place of increased symbolic, taste and experience based communities because industrialization, individualism and globalization have liberated the individual from the responsibilities of status communities and enabled a wider search for people with similar lifestyles and ideologies, as symbolic and taste communities are not subject to time or space (Harju 2003, 70-80). Raninen et al also write that human beings have an inbuilt need to feel included and to belong to groups and networks which are based on personal interests (2008, 8).

3.2.3 International voluntary work as an intercultural activity

An aspect that relates to both non-formal learning and sociality is international voluntary work as an intercultural activity. The special feature of international voluntary work which separates it from other forms of volunteering is that those involved in it come from different nationalities. Connected to this is the idea that with different nationalities, also different cultures are involved. Getting to know new cultures is a significant motivation for international volunteering (Lager et al 2009, 27) and increasing intercultural understanding and grassroots level cross-cultural encounters is one of the central aims of Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland (Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland).

Intercultural (or cross-cultural) encounters in international voluntary work are based on human beings being cultural beings; we are encultured from birth much like we are socialized into a community. Culture can be defined as a collective system of features such as beliefs, values, customs, social practices and communication (Virkama 2010, 42). Hofstede states that though basic human feelings (such as love, anger, fear) and a part of one's personality are inherit, it is culture that modifies how these feelings and characteristics become present in one's behaviour (2003 in Korhonen 2010, 17-18).

The process an individual faces with changing cultural environment is referred to as acculturation. Acculturation refers to changes in one's identity and in those features which make a culture (values, attitudes, communication, social norms etc). According to Berry, acculturation contains gradual loss of features of one's culture of origin (culture shedding) and gaining features of the new cultural context (cultural learning) (1992 in Korhonen 2010, 28-29). Talib also distinguishes psychological acculturation, which means long-term changes relating to cultural features and one's mental well-being, and socio-cultural acculturation, referring to one's fluency in social skills in the changed cultural context and the acceptance and understanding of diversity (2004, 43, in Korhonen 2010, 28). All of these characterizations of acculturation underline its meaning as an adaptation process when faced with changing cultural environments.

According to Berry, acculturation can lead to various outcomes (1992, 2007, in Korhonen 2010, 29). One can integrate into the new culture by adapting its social and communication norms without losing features of or appreciation towards one's culture of origin. One can also assimilate the new culture in such a way that one gradually loses one's ethnic cultural roots. On the other hand, acculturation may also lead to separation from new cultural influences and majority population and a stronger orientation towards one's ethnic culture of origin; in this event, no culture shedding or cultural learning takes place. At its extreme, acculturation can lead to marginalization, when one rejects both one's cultural roots and the present cultural environment. How one adapts to the changing cultural contexts (i.e. acculturation strategy) and the effect acculturation has on an individual depends on a variety of things, such as past cultural and cross-cultural influences and experiences and the mainstream population's attitude towards "other" (ethnic) cultures and cultural diversity. Individuals and groups are also not passive objects when faced with changing cultural environments but much like socialization, acculturation is a two-way process, affecting both the individual and his surroundings (Korhonen 2010, 27-30).

Acculturation relates strongly to the development of intercultural competence and sensitivity. Very briefly defined, intercultural competence is knowledge and skills that relate to other cultures and ease cross-cultural interaction (Virkama 2010, 50). Intercultural sensitivity emphasizes the understanding and awareness of cultural diversity which intercultural competence is based on, relating to the relativity of practices and values among all cultures (ethnorelativism) (Bennett 1998 in Korhonen 2010, 25). Jokikokko also views that intercultural competence and sensitivity are not merely skills and understanding relating to cultural diversity but potentially include a certain type of positive attitude and appreciation towards cultural diversity (2005 in Virkama 2010). Also Lough, McBride & Sherraden view that intercultural relations and competence, which they perceive to be interconnected and note to grow via international voluntary service, do not only reflect the amount of interaction volunteers

have with people from other cultural backgrounds, but also the interest towards intercultural relationships (2009, 2010). These statements reflect intercultural competence is only gained if it is valued.

Intercultural encounters, understanding and competence in international voluntary work is based on a conception that what is international is also intercultural. This reflects a common definition of culture to characterize people from the same nation. Many other definitions, however, do not limit culture only to characterize people from the same nation state (e.g. Eliasoph & Lichtermann 2003, Hofstede 2003 in Korhonen 2010). In her article "From Othering to Understanding", Virkama states that to view culture as a solid entity, for example defined by the borders of a nation state, is questionable because it does not take into consideration internal differences. Dervin also makes the claim that due to interaction with various cultural spheres (work, education, private life), human beings per se have intercultural competence because what is intra-cultural is also intercultural (2006, 112-113, in Virkama 2010, 51). Korhonen and Virkama find mutually in their articles on intercultural learning that due to globalization, increased (transnational) travelling and migration and access and exposure to information around the world, culture has become a complex, hybrid concept (2010).

3.2.4 International voluntary work as active citizenship

Previously in this thesis we have concluded that the kind of international voluntary work this thesis focuses on aims to benefit the society (outside of just the volunteer or his immediate social circle), and is thus synonymous with civic action. As this study's focus is on individual level perceptions and changes, this chapter focuses on a contemporary concept connected to both national and international voluntary work: active citizenship. European Commission defines active citizenship as "citizen's participation to...democratic and societal life in the society as a whole and in its [society] communities" (Commission statement 21.11.2001, 33, in Harju 2003, 99-100). Active citizenship is one of the aims of European Voluntary Service as well as one of the values of Maailmanvaihto ICYE - Finland (Veikkolainen et al 2012, 7).

Legislatively citizenship means nationality of a country, and the rights and obligations a citizen has in that country. On a practical level this means for example in Finland the right to vote and the obligation to participate to basic education (Raninen et al 2008, 31). Citizenship, however, can be understood more broadly. Rousseau defines a citizen as a person who "actively exercises his will in a public network of power-relations" (in Harju 2003, 90). According to UN Association of Finland's Global Citizenship Maturity Test, citizen is a member of society who recognizes common rules and norms and who can and will openly discuss, question and affect them (Harju 2003, 93). Citizenship is thus more than legislative rights and obligations, but one's moral rights, responsibilities and possibilities as a member of a society.

When citizenship is understood as rights and responsibilities which go beyond legislation, active citizenship is the awareness of those rights and responsibilities and active behaviour towards realizing them for the benefit of self and others. Korsgaard states that as citizenship is always about membership in a community, the goal is actively to shape the future of the communities one is involved in (2001b, 10-11 in Harju 2003, 100). Raninen et al state that active citizenship does not need to be glorious acts but that a person “becomes active citizen when he overcomes total self-centeredness and takes some kind of role in the activities of his communities” (2008, 40). Active citizenship can thus vary from more politically charged activities to neighbourhood help, from lobbying, petitioning and fundraising to sharing the car trip to work with one’s colleague to reduce travel costs and exhaust fumes.

Harju states that active citizenship requires knowledge about one’s rights and responsibilities, societal norms, culture and history as well as certain skills and competences including ability to communicate well, ability to solve conflicts, ability to negotiate and ability to accept difference (2003, 100). According to Benn, international studies show that these abilities develop best in voluntary work and civic engagement (2000 in Harju 2003, 100-101). However, international studies also show that international voluntary work can increase active citizenship. According to Lough et al (2009) and Machin (2008), returned volunteers are likely to get involved in civil society activities for example in terms of volunteering, donating, fundraising or campaigning after their voluntary service, both on a national as well as international level. In this respect one can speak of active global citizenship, in which the society one actively tries to shape is understood as the whole world.

Global active citizenship combines and connects all the theoretical concepts discussed in the previous sub-chapters. As stated in the paragraph above, active citizenship requires the kind of knowledge and skills which is assumed to develop in civic action and which is reported to develop via international voluntary work (Benn 2000 in Harju 2003, 100-101, Lough et al 2009, Machin 2008). Based on what is previously discussed in this thesis, these skills are linked to non-formal learning as well as considered to develop as a result of social and communal interaction. Communal interaction enhances one’s personal growth and identity development because an individual is an individual only in relation to other people and cannot know oneself without others (Harju 2003, 72). Thus communities and social capital are seen as enforcing the well-being and bond of individual and society and decreasing and preventing exclusion (Mykkänen-Hänninen 2007, 6, Harju 2003, 45). On the other hand, the social interaction with others that communities enable also enhances one’s intellectual-emotional abilities to take others into consideration because community’s rights are community member’s responsibilities (Harju 2003, 74, 83). With this in mind, returned volunteers may use the skills and social capital they have developed during their international voluntary service to further or advocate projects for example in their country, as is documented in some international studies

(McBride et al 2010, Lough et al 2009). Behind this is considered to be the increase of international awareness, i.e. the interest, knowledge and understanding one has towards global issues and matters outside of one's own country (McBride et al 2010, 2, Lough et al 2009, 9). Lough et al note that the concepts relating to international voluntary service are interconnected, making it difficult to separate them from one another (2009, 10). They go on to state that this interconnectedness predicts changes in one area (e.g. global awareness) will lead also to changes in other areas (e.g. active global citizenship).

4 STUDY DESIGN

4.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions of returned volunteers of *Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland* on their international voluntary work experience and in particular what kind of changes - such as changes in perceptions, attitudes, behaviour and action - it has brought along to the volunteers' lives. The research question of this study was "how returned volunteers perceive international voluntary work has impacted their lives?". The focus of this study was chosen together with the working life partner *Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland*, to whom contribution was to provide information on their overseas activities in an in-depth way which goes beyond feedback questionnaires, tacit knowledge and gut feeling. This was realized by providing the returned volunteers the possibility to discuss aspects they considered essential for their international voluntary work experience by using methods of qualitative research and interviewing. During the analysis of those interviews, it became evident the interview data also gave answers to another, vaster research question: "how returned volunteers perceive their international voluntary work experience?" (further details in 4.2.3 Data analysis). The findings of this added research questions were decided to be included in this study, which moreover supported the aims of this study. Outside of providing *Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland* information on their activities to further develop them, these aims included giving voice to the volunteers, something currently seen missing in voluntary work research (Nylund & Yeung 2005, 14, 22). The aim was also to give thanks and recognition to volunteers, which was also a general aim of European Year of Volunteering 2011, an event which contributed motivationally to the making of this study (European Year of Volunteering 2011). The interest toward the topic has also risen from my personal experiences and professional interests toward international and national volunteering.

4.2 Research paradigms and methods

Qualitative research methods were chosen for this study because they are intertwined with the aims of this study. Much like this study, qualitative research is interested in the subject-

tive world of the researched phenomenon: people's perceptions and experiences. Qualitative research is linked in science to postmodernism. It challenges the view that modernism has both on reality and knowledge and is connected to the idea that phenomena and people's lives are so diversified and socially constructed that in order to study and gain knowledge of them, one should approach the experienced world by going close to the human source itself (Flick 2002, 2). This is perceived to be better reached by going out of the classroom or laboratory and by interviewing and observing people. In this respect qualitative research has a strong emphasis on in-depth, naturally occurring data, the approach to which is inductive; its purpose is not to test hypotheses based on pre-existing theories but rather to form new theory which emerges from the collected qualitative data (Rossman & Rallis 2012, 8-9). This kind of naturalistic research paradigm (i.e. framework used to organize reasoning in a research), which emphasizes the study participants' role as experts on the studied phenomenon and focuses on their voice (Babbie 2002, 27, 288), is also present in this study.

Another paradigm present in this study, and one very characteristic of qualitative research, is the perception of reality as a social construction. Based on this the findings of a research cannot be universal, and thus like in quantitative research generalization is not sought after, because the data of a study is always contextually formed and affected. Because people are not passive but active subjects in their life processes, the participants of a qualitative research form the data with giving meanings and producing interpretations (Heikkinen 2010, 145-146). The socially constructed and contextual nature of the research does not end with the data production, for the data is collected, analyzed and interpreted by another human instrument, the researcher. Kiviniemi states that "as such, qualitative data does not depict reality, but reality transfers to us via interpretive prisms and perspectives" (2010, 73). The gradually growing awareness of the studied phenomenon and the interplay between field data and theory which are depictive of both naturalistic and constructivist paradigms make qualitative research more of a creative than a linear process, where changes in data collection, analysis and theoretical framework may take place during research (Kiviniemi 2010). This has been also the case in this Bachelor's thesis, as will be further elaborated in this thesis.

4.2.1 Sampling: Participants of the study

The participants of this study were Finns who had participated to international voluntary work abroad via nongovernmental organisation Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland. As learning experiences of intercultural nature take time to formulate in a person's life story (McBride et al 2010, 3), the focus was on returned volunteers whose international volunteering experience dated some years back. The outset in this study was that returned volunteers who have participated in international voluntary work years ago will have a different perspective than

newly returned volunteers, and will likelier be more able to reflect the impact and meaning of their experiences. From this perspective, this study's focus was also on long-term changes.

With the focus of the study in mind, returned volunteers from 2007 were chosen as a target group for this study. The prospective participants were collectively contacted via Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's undisclosed e-mailing lists with an introductory letter of the study of this Bachelor's thesis (see Appendix 1). The way in which the prospective participants were approached was to maintain the participation to the study both voluntary and confidential: the returned volunteers' identities and contact information stayed unknown to the undersigned unless they participated in the study, in which case their identity stayed unknown to the working-life partner, because they contacted the undersigned directly. Narrowing the prospective participants to a focus group of specific year of returned volunteers made the method of choosing participants, the sampling of the study, partly purposeful (Patton 2002, 240-241). For the most part, however, the sampling was chosen due to time limitations and accessibility, making it a convenience sampling (Patton 2002, 241-242); there was for example no special reason why returned volunteers from 2007 were chosen as a target group instead another year of returned volunteers.

In the end, six returned volunteers took part to the study; a seventh prospective participant also showed interest but was unreachable after initial contact. All of the six participants were female and either students and/or in working life, with educational background ranging from basic education to Master's degree. The average age of the participants was 27 years. Roughly the participants could be divided into two groups: those, who participated to international voluntary work straight from high school ("young volunteers"), and those in their (later) twenties, who already had further educational, working life or international experience prior their voluntary service. Half of the returned volunteers had participated to European Voluntary Service and half to ICYE volunteer programme; it could also be roughly divided that the young volunteers participated more to ICYE volunteer programme. The voluntary work placements of the participants were connected to social or educational field, taking place in home-like institutions or more project-based non-profit organizations. The average time the participants spent on their voluntary service was nine and a half months. Two of the participants live currently abroad.

4.2.2 Data collection

The data of this study was collected as qualitative interviews in October and November 2011, with majority of the interviews taking place in a cluster in the middle of the interviewing period. Half (three) of the interviews were conducted in the capital area, half on the internet via Skype due to geographical limitations. All interviews were recorded: Olympus tape re-

corder courtesy of Laurea University of Applied Sciences was used for the face-to-face interviews, a free downloadable MP3 Skype recorder version 2.1.1.1 was used for the Skype interviews all but one, in which the Olympus was used, as the MP3 Skype recorder was not yet discovered at that point. Each interview began with a revision of the purpose of the study as previously explained in the introductory letter, the proceedings after the interviews (data analysis, approximate publication, possible internet articles) and verbal explanation of the informed consent (see Appendix 2). The interviews lasted on average, fairly evenly so, an hour (60 minutes). All interviews were conducted in Finnish.

The qualitative interviews in this study had a strong narrative approach. Narrative interviews are a part of narrative research which “refers to an approach, which focuses on stories as conveyors and constructors of knowledge” (Heikkinen 2010, 142). These stories can follow a structure and a plot, such as a biography, or be more fragmented counters of a specific situation or an experience, such as in an episodic interview (Flick 2002, 96, 104-105, Heikkinen 2010, 147). Whichever type of story as focus, narrative research is based on the idea that understanding, interpreting and explaining ourselves and the world via stories is something natural to human beings - in fact, we do it on a daily basis. Narratives were chosen for this study because they seem like a natural way of collecting as well as producing data, when the focus of the study is a specific period in a person’s life and its reflection in retrospect. This also led to the view that in order for the informants to reflect on the impact, they should also reflect on the experience itself, as well as how they came to participate to it. Both of these notions were supported and highlighted in a test interview in summer 2011 with a person fitting the participant criteria (a returned volunteer). This test interview revealed that for example a brief exploration on the background of the volunteer answers the research question with more contexts and that a narrative interview is a natural way to approach the topic; prior to this, a more unstructured qualitative interview was considered. In this respect, narrative research does not, also in this study, only refer to the research methods of collecting data in narratives but also to the approach to knowledge, which in narrative research is done from a strongly (social) constructivist paradigm (Heikkinen 2010, 144-145).

On a practical level, a narrative interview starts with ‘a generative narrative question’ in which the interviewer asks the interviewee to explain ‘how it all began’, the main narrative of the interview (Riemann & Schütze 1987, 353, in Flick 2002, 97). This question should be broad but also limiting. It should be specifically relevant to the focus of study, whether an area or a period in life, yet detailed enough a question at that. This, according to Flick, is based on the constraints of closing gestalt, condensing and detailing which come to effect immediately as the narrative begins (2002, 99). This means that, in addition to the interviewee wanting to finish the narrative he started, he will condense from the narrative all as-

pects unrelated to the narrative question as well as bring forth all aspects related to it, so that the story will be easily understood. The generative narrative question of this study was:

I would like that you tell me how your international voluntary work experience has changed or affected your life. I would like that you start by explaining briefly what got you involved with international voluntary work and by describing your volunteering experience and its framework (e.g. where you were, for how long, which kind of voluntary work you did), after which I would like you to explain what has happened in your life afterwards on different levels (e.g. in activities or perceptions), which you experience to be precisely due to the international voluntary work experience.

After this initiative question, the focus in a narrative interview is on the interviewee's story. The narrative interview does not follow a pre-determined interview guide but is based on the main narrative, followed up by probing and clarifying questions, sometimes even suggestive questions, for example in terms of condensing the interviewee's elaborate explanation to see if its main meaning has been understood. These questions are always placed after a closing gestalt; the interviewer does not interrupt or hurry the interviewee but signals his (the interviewer's) interest and listening in other, non-verbal ways (Flick 2002, 96-98). In this respect narratives are unstructured interviews: they have a strong focus on the interviewee and his experimental world, what and how he depicts from it. The asset of this is that the interviewee is likelier to bring forth something that might go missed in a more structured and thematically guided interview. Concerning this, narrative interview is not merely a research method in this study, but also serves the aims of this study in terms of giving voice to the volunteers. According to Schütze and Hermanns (1976 and 1995, in Flick 2002, 99) a narration takes a life of its own when people begin narrating, resulting sometimes in people revealing more than they knew they know or wanted to reveal. With reconstructing thoughts and experiences, qualitative interview is a powerful research tool which has also the potential to provide the interviewees with an increased understanding of their experience and empower the interviewees. This was also the case in this study concerning some of the participants, which will be explained further in the findings.

As Flick states, participants of a research may have certain expectations about a research interview based on a general understanding of an interview following a question-answer - structure (2002, 101). As narrative interview is not based on an interview guide but one single question, the main narrative question, participants may react negatively if they discover the interview type only in the interview. Participants may feel pressured to talk freely without structure, become irritated when structure does not exist and possibly conclude lack of inter-

view guide to be due to interviewer's incompetence and unpreparedness. In addition, despite of narrations being a part of everyday life, the forum and focus which is provided for them in a narrative interview may feel overpowering instead of empowering. These aspects may result in participants losing trust in the interviewer's abilities, not limited to interviewing skills but extending to understanding, interpreting and treating the data confidentially. Lack of trust, then again, affects the interviewees' will to produce data, which any qualitative interview is dependent on. (Flick 2002, 101)

To avoid misconceptions and in order for an initial trust to build, providing participants information about the focus of the study and the nature of the interview beforehand was found essential. This was done by e-mail in connection with agreeing the interview dates with each individual returned volunteer. The participants were told that the interview would be narrative and that they should not expect a list of pre-determined questions but to be prepared to have the focus strongly on them and their free flow of speech on the development of events.

Prior information about the study was also given beforehand to prevent the participants to speak overtly outside the topic, complicating further data analysis. As mentioned before, starting with a brief exploration on the motives and the international voluntary work period seemed like a natural and essential way to approach the life or the "outcomes" afterwards. On the other hand, it had the potential to derail the main narrative entirely from the start, resulting in participants lingering unnecessarily long and detailed in the starting experience of the interview story, considering the focus of the study lies elsewhere. In such situations, it is the interviewer's task to direct the interviewee's story back to its track with the purpose and research question of the study in mind. This possibility of subtle direction on the spot, in addition to clarifying questions, tones of voice, facial reactions and all the 'mmm's' and 'hmm's' that naturally occur in speech and also form a part of research data, is an asset of qualitative interviewing which would not have existed had the data been collected for example in the form of narrative essays. The possibility of using a voice recorder enables making observatory notes during the interviews, which adds reason to the choice of qualitative interview as a data collection method. The afore-mentioned aspects emphasize that the most important ingredient for a successful qualitative research interview is good interviewing skills. An interview is a conversation with a purpose, a discursive tool to collect information based on a mutual topic between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 2-3). In this respect a qualitative research interview, even an unstructured one, is never unstructured nor equivalent to a casual conversation with a friend. Also for this purpose the test interview of summer 2011 was conducted, to hone for example probing and clarifying questions both narrative and unstructured interviews rely on.

Providing information about the narrative interview was also given so that the interviewees would be prepared to reserve plenty of time to reflect the research question, preferably also beforehand. Narrative interviews as data collection method are also demanding for the participants. Without knowing the focus of the study beforehand, participants may find it difficult suddenly to reflect their past experiences in-depth, especially when time has passed from them. Connected to this, following an idea from one of my first thesis advisors, the interviewees were encouraged to make a timeline drawing. This was proposed to help discuss and explain different aspects better in the interview, as they are already reflected prior to it. To the author's knowledge at least one of the interviewees did this and used it as a tool to regain the order of "how it all happened", which reflected positively in the interview.

In order for the interviewees not to feel overpowered by the self-reflection requiring interview method, some back-up questions for the interviews were also prepared. These questions came useful when interviewees expressed resistance to reflect or elaborate, or when themes originating from the narratives were exhausted but the interviewee still expressed interest and energy to discuss the topic. After the first interview, these questions were formed by utilizing the aims of the two volunteer programmes, much of which this study's theoretical framework is based on. The interviewees were thus asked about for example international, intercultural and interreligious grassroots level contacts and understanding, learning opportunities and societal influencing (i.e. active citizenship, feelings of solidarity), though exact list of (additional) questions cannot be provided, as the interviews were very individualistic and in most these themes came up naturally from the narrations.

4.2.3 Data analysis

After the interviews, the interview recordings were transferred to a computer and transcribed. The transcriptions were done word to word including every sigh, pause and filler word ("like", "sort of", "mm") from both the participant and the interviewer. Though immensely time-consuming, the very detailed typing process already initiated the analysis process on a thought level, followed by a more rigorous study of the ready-typed interview data.

The analysis method used in this study was content analysis, or as referred to in narrative research, analysis of narratives. Content analysis means reducing and condensing raw interview data into core consistencies, patterns, themes and categories (Patton 2002, 453). This was done inductively, meaning that the content was looked into emerging from the data. Patton points out that data analysis includes a lot of interpretation: making sense, attaching significance and overall "going beyond the descriptive data" (2002, 480). This relates well to themes and categories arising inductively from the data, for which Patton offers an example with a study where participants of a community leadership training were left in an "action

paralysis” after the programme. “No one used that specific phrase [action paralysis]. Rather, we interpreted that as the essence of what the interviewees were reporting...---” (Patton 2002, 478). According to Patton interpretation in qualitative data analysis is both acceptable and expected, as long as the difference between what is interpreted and what is described is made (2002, 480).

On a practical level, the data analysis was conducted manually, meaning no data analysis programme identifying specific words was used in this study. The interview transcripts were read through numerous times, for making notes and coding the interview data. According to Guba, the first step of coding is finding recurring regularities in the data (1978, in Patton 2002, 465). The regularities can be condensed into categories, which ought to be then examined for internal homogeneity, the extent to which data in a category applies to and supports the category, and external heterogeneity, which separates categories from one another. According to Guba, forming several categories with overlapping content is a way to see something is wrong with the category system. This happened also in this study, resulting in struggles and re-doing the data analysis.

In order to form a category system without overlapping themes, narrative analysis was used as an inter-phases analysis method. Narrative analysis refers to an approach in which the raw interview data is rewritten into a story form, keeping all the essential themes of the story within it (Polkinghorne 1995, 6-8 in Heikkinen 2010, 148). Narrative analysis was used because, although some of the interviews followed a very narrative structure, others came out more fragmented and difficult to follow. Re-writing the interview data in a more chronological and structured order, removing repetitions and filler words, proved time consuming but eventually essential to illuminate the patterns and themes in the data; content analysis was still used following the narrative analysis. Simultaneously it also proved that the findings were so inter-connected it was impossible to form themes or categories which would not to some extent overlap.

As more final stages of the data analysis, the data was examined deductively with pre-existing sensitizing concepts (‘social capital’, ‘active citizenship’) in mind. This was done following the inductive analysis, with the aim of organizing the findings (Taylor & Bogdan 1984, 127 in Patton 2002, 454), not for imposing concepts or meanings into the data. At this point the data was also looked for divergence. In this study divergence meant analyzing the data which did not seem to fit any category or pattern (Guba 1978 in Patton 2002, 476), and as a result some individual data was left outside the study.

The data analysis enforced an idea that had come across already during the interviews concerning the diversity between the participants’ stories as well as the overall structure of the

interviews. The data analysis showed that though the data answered the original research question of “how returned volunteers perceive international voluntary work has impacted their lives”, it also produced insight into what motivated the participants to take part to international voluntary work and how the participants experienced their international voluntary work period, with a strong emphasis on the latter. To have the data answer these questions was not surprising as it was known beforehand that the data collection method would also cover these areas. The extent to which the data provided insight into the international voluntary work period compared to the original research question was however somewhat dominating. As there was significant amount of data on the international voluntary work experience, the second research question of “how returned volunteers perceive their international voluntary work experience” with its findings was decided to be included in this study. As a result of content analysis, the themes became “work experience and career development”, “international social contacts and relationships” and the comprehensive “informal learning experiences”. A fourth theme of “volunteer background implications on the outcomes” was also considered briefly, but was ultimately left out as the extent to which participants’ motives or prior experiences related to their voluntary work period or its outcomes were already sufficiently apparent in the above-mentioned three themes. For this reason a third research question regarding motives was also left out of the study. Thesis supervision was consulted for the changes in research questions and narrowing the themes.

5 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of how returned volunteers of ICYE Finland perceive their international voluntary work experience and its impact on their lives. The participants’ experiences and stories varied greatly. For someone international voluntary work changed the direction of their adult life holistically, for someone else it became a somewhat separate period in life - and then there was everything in between. It is important to note that there was no single commonality which applied to all of the participants’ stories outside of perceiving their international voluntary work period as a primarily great experience. Despite of the very diverse interview data, the participants’ stories did share commonalities.⁶

5.1 Work experience and career development

As a part of their international voluntary work, half of the participants volunteered in non-profit organizations and half in home-like or educational institutions. All of the participants’ voluntary work placements were connected to social field or education, though the content of the voluntary work and its target group varied among the participants.

⁶ The quotations have been modified by removing revealing attributes and unnecessary filler words. The quotes in original language can be seen in Appendix 3.

Some of the participants changed their initial voluntary work placement during the course of their volunteering period due to experienced difficulties. The returned volunteers perceived voluntary work placement problems to include language barriers, lack of a clear description of work, staff's low level of education, lack of guidance and approach to work in terms of attitude and working methods.

"And of course I didn't, it was their system and they had done it like that for [sighs] who knows how long, and I wasn't any, first of all I couldn't communicate very well with them and secondly I didn't have much, I didn't have almost any possibilities to impact there, of course because I was, because they would've of course wanted me to use the same methods [of corporal punishment], and that I of course refused to do, but I didn't have any possibility to affect them and this is how I experienced it, and it was very difficult that, kind of, there I was but couldn't in any way, mm...like impact or...do anything sensible because it happened in that framework and you couldn't really get away from that [framework]..." (P.2)

The voluntary work placement difficulties in this study relate more to the younger volunteers. Many of the participants perceived that prior vocational or volunteering experience of the voluntary work's theme or content, which some participants had and others did not, was of some kind of benefit. When such experience existed, it generated ideas for own initiatives, when it did not exist, it increased a feeling of uselessness. Difficulties were also experienced intensified when the work's role in the overall experience was given high significance, as highlighted by the following differing views on lack of sensible work.

"...you got such free hands in almost all of the placements, that I could've invented anything, and then I could've done something...maybe the age came against a little bit, that I was so young that I did not have the courage, that it was the first time when I was travelling alone and I had not travelled that much before otherwise, so, that I just couldn't, I didn't have enough of that initiative, I felt so frustrated somehow there...and it was a great experience, it was just somehow different because I thought I left there to do some useful work and that I did not do." (P.3)

"...in the end one can maybe honestly say that I did not actually work there...it was probably mutual, they had a huge rush and a lot of, they had taken a lot of volunteers, many of whom did not have work, and we interpreted it so that they did it to get money. And on the other hand I probably came quite quickly to the conclusion that, I am in a totally new place in the world and there are a lot of wonderful people here from elsewhere, I have never been here and from here I can travel so life is good..." (P.4)

Overall some of the participants, including some of those who had changes in their initial voluntary work placement, considered international voluntary work to enable valuable work experience. The participants perceived that, coupled with a close work community and the placement's experience with guiding volunteers, they could learn and gradually implement new things in the placement at their own initiative and phase. The same participants who credited their voluntary work placement positively also perceived it to have had a direct and on-going impact on their further employment or studies, both nationally and abroad. The participants considered that increased knowledge of the voluntary work's content affected their interest to study or work with certain themes, even in specific places. The participants also felt that specific methods, approaches and skills which they learnt in their voluntary work placement, in addition to knowledge of the host country's language, have been of use in their further employment. Some of the participants also continued co-operation with their voluntary work placement after their international voluntary work experience.

"...I didn't know anything about (...) or what kind of work (...) does at that point, but via that I got to see it and experience it and then it just felt more and more interesting and I was sure that that is what I want to do and it felt very precious experience, considering that if I wanted to do that later, so then it felt like a good way to learn the practical side of that work...and I was very aware that in Nordic countries you don't ever get into such a place before having studied at the university..." (P.2)

"...otherwise I had not been in contact with (...), but of course that I had just been in contact with (...) affected that I applied work from (...), that it was very natural...in that way the voluntary service affected my future that I gravitated to work in (...) where I am now for the fifth year as a gig worker...and when one sees that in my CV, all the people in that field know what that place is, and I believe it will be of benefit, that it has been concerning getting the [previously spoken] study place, and I believe that it will be [of more benefit]...that, it has been enormously beneficial, plus the work itself has taught me so much..." (P.5)

Though participants considered international voluntary work to affect their career development on some level, this was not easily recognized by all participants. For example the contributor of the above quote mentioned at the end of the interview that she had not thought of it before, but sees now that via the above-mentioned workplace, international voluntary work has affected more broadly her career development. Another participant noted she believes international voluntary work not having any kind of impact as a mention in the CV, but later acknowledged it may have improved her chances in getting a study place.

5.2 International social contacts and relationships

The majority of the participants considered that they enjoyed a great social life during their international voluntary work. The participants considered to have made international friends consisting of both local friends and colleagues and other international volunteers, for some participants with more emphasis on one than the other; the framework (work and living arrangements, location) of the voluntary service was considered to an extent to channel with whom socializing happens. A few of the participants mentioned that the relationships which are formed during international voluntary work feel of especially close nature because of the context in which they take place: living in tight-knit communities, having time to socialize.

“...when one is in a small community and so close, and it’s new and wonderful for everybody and everybody’s nervous, then in that somehow the people probably become somehow even more important, or I believe that they become more important and closer...there one commits to the people, and the friendships become such which are much closer than for example in Finland with schoolmates, they are not the same at all, not as deep.” (P.5)

“...some kind of imagined connection to people, that was maybe the thing, that the kind of chitchat, which feels as though there is no time for it [normally], and that there interaction happened very much face-to-face.” (P.4)

Despite of making many friends during their international voluntary work, some of the participants also discussed less pleasant social contacts. The participants staying in host families, altogether three in this study, did not consider the relationship with the host family to be a positive one. This they reflected mainly to be due to an experienced lack of interest from the host family’s side, which ultimately led to accommodation re-arrangements for the participants. A couple of the participants also perceived negatively people who tried to benefit of their Western origin.

“...mainly I have made sensible friends but then there are a couple of (...) who have from the get-go clang on to me and or this Western like, that when you know one Westerner that one will help...that help me get a study place, help me get a job in Finland, help me...anything possible.” (P.1)

Many of the participants perceived the significance of the international voluntary work experience came particularly from the formed close relationships. Though participants considered keeping in touch between nations after years challenging, many have still continued the friendships they formed during international voluntary work via internet and visits abroad.

Some of the participants reflected the role of the relationships during and after the international voluntary work period goes beyond international contacts and visits: in providing peer support during and after the volunteering period, in increasing interest and comfort-level to socialize with other international people and as a significant factor in a number of implicit learning experiences touched upon in the following chapter.

5.3 Informal learning experiences

The participants perceived that during their international voluntary work period they underwent different kinds of learning experiences relating to the changed setting they were living in. The vast majority of the participants perceived this new environment enabled them to get to know and learn about another culture, specifically the host country's culture. Participants considered this to be reflected in understanding and learning different customs, norms, worldviews and mentalities, and in feelings of being a part of and belonging to the local community. In connection with the topic, the participants discussed several aspects they perceived to enable cultural understanding during their international voluntary work period. The most mentioned aspects were contacts with local people, knowledge of local language and own motivation; for many of the participants living experience in another country and culture was a motivation to volunteer abroad, and for some this motivation was enforced by prior experiences of living abroad. The participants perceived that as they knew local people, they got to see and experience the every-day in another country, as well as participate to different kinds of events and visit locations less travelled by tourists. In this connection, international voluntary work was compared to other internalization possibilities and accredited for its framework in terms of length of stay and an immediate entry to local communities. Several participants also perceived that knowledge of the local language, or lack thereof, affected communication with locals.

"...when one spends that much time there one gets inside the codes differently and understands them...one tried as much as possible, then also when one noticed that which things, like through own experience, that which things are tolerated and which not and of course one had to then let go of some things a little bit, or that it is in a very concrete way experienced what is possible and what is not possible in that culture, because it also limits itself...if one really wants to get inside a culture in that kind of way, one has to spend a longer time [in it] and participate into a community through which one will get a kind of an entrance into the culture, mm, for sure." (P.2)

"...the more one learned the language the more one experienced that, look at that, the market seller didn't try to cheat money from me this week, that he has learned

[laughs], and then it became very important to me, or I remember having experienced it as very important that, for example a local store's woman, when she came across me on the street she greeted me and I remember that it gave a great feeling, that like when you walk on the street and there are people you know who greet you...I remember having felt belonging there..." (P.5)

Some of the participants, more precisely participants of the ICYE volunteer programme, said having experienced "culture shock" in the beginning of their international voluntary work. This was considered to be due to new, different cultural environment, and tightly connected to the previously discussed difficulties with the voluntary work placement and host families as well as lack of support from the host country's ICYE. During this initial period, the length of which varied between the participants, the participants considered ending their international voluntary work period. These participants mentioned that, outside of making changes in the voluntary placement, time and adaptation helped in overcoming the initial difficulties.

"...the first months were quite difficult, if we go backwards still, that that adaptation to the culture, foreign language and all that new, so that was in a way quite tough and at one point I was like, I was strongly of the opinion that I have seen this in a month, I am going back to Finland [laughs] but, luckily I didn't...then I didn't want to leave anymore, that I had been there already (...) and at that point I had adapted there that much that I didn't like, that I experienced that I had all work unfinished and I am leaving nowhere..." (P.6)

The participants' cultural experiences varied greatly and the extent to which cultural learning occurs during international voluntary work was perceived differently. Some of the participants experienced that as foreigners, certain restrictions did not apply and they might have gotten even a broader view about life in the other country than locals themselves. Some other participants, then again, perceived their foreignness limited access to the local everyday. Although most of the participants considered that international voluntary work provided some level of insight into another culture, many were hesitant to conclude it went beyond that, for example in terms of some special knowledge or skills. The participants reflected the experience brought a sense of intercultural sensitivity in terms of the relativity of the gained knowledge and the carefulness not to make assumptions, generalizations or assume an expert position based on it.

"...even though one spends that much time it is after all such a small part, even at that point it is such a tiny part of it that, what understanding is, and there one kind of also realizes that how much there is to learn..." (P.2)

"...intercultural competence is such an ameba-like concept that because it means different things to different people and at what point I can say that I am competent in something, or that, that I cannot say that I have been in (...) that now that I go to (...) I will be like fish in water, all of that, that is total bullshit, that if someone claims that, this is the sovereign expert of all fields, and that I have been in (...) I do not necessarily know how people operate on the other side of the country, that somehow, that maybe that is a thing, which has also maybe partly become more refined in (...), that one is a bit more careful about, that, when making statements, how the things are." (P.4)

Many of the participants also perceived that international voluntary work broadened their worldview. Participants experienced that living abroad increased or, in the case of the younger volunteers, even changed their awareness and understanding about different kinds of societal, cultural and geographical conditions, in particular the relation of these conditions to people's behavior and thought. A couple of the participants also reflected this creates some challenges to finding mutual understanding.

"...for example things which I thought to be more universal, that such values which I thought that everyone can identify with in some way or at least, maybe not everyone but people everywhere, but some people everywhere can identify with them, that that is not necessarily [sighs] so, that I understood somehow more how different conditions affect them, the concrete conditions, societal conditions and even physical conditions affect people's worldview and their psyche also, directly, that there exists that difference...and, that one doesn't so easily...judge." (P.2)

As implied in the quote above, many of the participants also noted that the increased understanding of different ways people behave and different frameworks people live in also relates to changes in attitude, the most common of which is acceptance of diversity. Although most of the participants considered international voluntary work increased their acceptance of diversity, many also considered no radical change happened, as international volunteers were considered by default to be open, tolerant people.

"One easily thinks to be like totally over-tolerant when one has been somewhere outside of Finland but probably this is not ever fully so, and probably there also ever came such experiences that, you experienced to better understand some people's different way to function and, mm, why not. On the other hand I do not believe that such people who would be per se very narrow-minded or even racists, that I think that such people who would need it the most would not gravitate to it unfortunately..." (P.4)

A few of the participants also emphasized that the increased understanding of people's behavior and thought was first and foremost due to the face-to-face interaction with the people they encountered. Different cultural backgrounds were considered to play a role in this, implying the broadened worldview with its increased understanding and tolerance was not only due to observation in another country but having the grassroots encounters in that country. On the other hand, as implied by one of the participants, the quality of those contacts also shaped which kind of changes happened within the worldview, though she added personal attributes also play a role.

"...unfortunately it has also changed me in a bad way, I have become fairly cynical...I do notice that...I am a very idealistic person otherwise also...I notice that the world is not as perfect as I believed at that time, then anyway when one has lived in such a Finnish bubble and comes a little bit out to the world, that whether that is in Europe or somewhere further, and notices that not everything is so well, and, look at that, people are not so interested, so maybe that was the thing which was difficult for me, to experience it so young..." (P.3)

Negatively perceived encounters with people also seemed to have a connection with the participants' attitude or future participation to civil action. A couple of the participants reflected that their experiences in the host project or community increased their skepticism towards certain third sector activities and discouraged them to take part to civic action directly related to their hosting project or country. On the other hand, the participants' stories reflected that changes in worldview can affect societal participation also in another kind of way; a couple other participants noted that, as they understood and accepted the different societal conditions, they also accepted their possible flaws. Thus, when it came to for example the hosting project, participants did not consider it their position to point out flaws and start to fix them, even if they considered room for development existed. Overall the participants' stories reflected that regarding third sector activities in the international voluntary work placement's host country or community, most participants shunned any activities which put them in an expert or helper position. It is also important to mention some of the participants have taken part to third sector activities after their international voluntary work period, though they considered this to have been based on prior interests and involvement. One of the participants also told her increased awareness made her more interested and active to influence certain issues on a societal level. This she considered to be also due to the realization of how much can be achieved with little initiatives, which she ultimately perceived to also enforce her self-confidence.

Self-confidence was one of the main commonalities participants perceived to increase via their international voluntary work experience. This growth of self-confidence participants

considered to be reflected in feelings and observations of overall managing (“pärjätä”) in life, which came about via various positive and challenging experiences.

”...I had all the problems [in the host country]...so there was kind of that good side that I had to take a lot of responsibility myself in the end, and I couldn’t be like everything is ready on a platter...because then when I didn’t have any organization behind me I went there by my own. And I had already kind of, I wasn’t so insecure, I knew more or less how to advance and how things are done...” (P.6)

As implied by the above quote, some of the participants also considered that their increased self-confidence has lowered the threshold to travel or live abroad. Several of the participants of this study have moved abroad for varied periods of time as a direct consequence of their international voluntary work experience, although their reasons for it are very varied and beyond having the confidence to do so. As also implied in the quote, a couple of participants mentioned self-confidence to grow via independent hands-on organizing of matters. Independence in itself was not however considered to increase essentially, as in particular the older volunteers pointed out they were already independent prior their international voluntary work experience.

Overall the participants perceived that international voluntary work enabled a host of learning experiences which were connected to its communal and intercultural framework. Several of the participants mentioned that it was specifically being outside of the influences of their normal everyday in terms of its schedules and social and cultural factors which enabled reflection about a variety of issues and a more intense engagement to social activities during the voluntary work period. This was considered to enable self-growth which generally came across in all of the participants’ interviews with slightly different word choices and emphasis. With this a few of the participants referred to the aforementioned self-confidence and broadened worldviews, however many of the participants struggled to elaborate or define what this “growth as a human being” meant for them; one participant said she would need a separate interview merely to ponder this question. One of the participants implied there is a reason why learning experiences of international voluntary work are difficult to put into words. This, however, was not considered to diminish their value.

”...maybe that is somehow very human or that human being functions like that, that maybe the most important lessons are such which cannot necessarily be verbalized, or that it has been the feeling, the experience that has been at that time very freed and calm and positive...it feels like what you get out of it is something very intangible, something very abstract, those experiences...but on the other hand why isn’t it possible to receive through that, that maybe it is that own twisted thought,

that it is just associated to everything having to be so effective and whatever, to accomplish something very concrete in that time, well, hello.” (P.4)

”...it has really been such a big experience...and then so important and educating and overall totally necessary, I feel now, or I feel like I never would have wanted to, I would never want to be without it...I think that that is important that it is known and that it is acknowledged what it can do.” (P.2)

6 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to find out the perceptions of returned volunteers of Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland on their international voluntary work experience, with a particular interest on the experienced outcomes. The participants of this study were six returned volunteers whose international voluntary work experience dated approximately five years back; this study's focus was also on long-term changes. On a general note, the participants perceived their international voluntary work period as a primarily positive experience. The participants perceived they got work experience, formed social contacts and relationships and underwent a host of learning experiences relating to the communal and intercultural framework they were living in. Through these experiences participants perceived to for example develop intercultural sensitivity, broaden their worldview and enforce their self-confidence.

One of the most common aspects of the participants' stories was that they enjoyed a rich social life during their international voluntary work period. The findings showed that most of the participants made social contacts and formed close relationships with people from other nationalities, some of which have continued up until today. Due to these relationships with other international volunteers and locals from the hosting community, participants have made trips abroad, including return trips to the host country. This finding is very much aligned with the notion that for example McBride et al have concerning the use of social capital via international voluntary service (2010, 2). Arguably some of the participants have also used their social capital to further (internationally oriented) career intentions, as some of the participants continued co-operation with the voluntary work placement and the work experience was perceived to be of significance by some concerning their future career development.

Much aligned with Harju's take on the interconnectedness of social capital and communality (2003, 66), some of the returned volunteers of this study also noted that the social contacts and relationships were due to living in close communities. The communities the participants spoke of during their interviews had both the operational and symbolic elements Lehtonen refers to (1990, 23-27, 33-34 in Harju 2003, 71): working and doing together (operational) and

having the feeling of belonging together (symbolic). On the other hand, one could also say experience based community (Lash 1996, 219-221, Maffesoli 1993, 63 and Jurvansuu 2002, 22, in Harju 2003, 71- 72) better describes the communities the participants spoke of, as none of the participants actually perceived or implied the feeling of inclusion would have been due to shared ideologies (as in symbolic communities), rather due to shared experiences and a shared, undefined connection. What was implied particularly in one of the participants' quote, however, was that the formation of these relationships, or this experience-based community, had to do with having face-to-face interaction and having time for this interaction. This implies that the concrete doing and being together, the operational element of communality, supports also the feeling of inclusion and being a community. With the comparisons between the social contacts of international voluntary work to the ones back in the returned volunteers' home countries, from a social services student's perspective it would be interesting to study the socialization in international voluntary work even further.

The social aspect of international voluntary work was also to an extent considered to enable a deeper perspective of the host country's culture, as some of these social contacts and relationships were formed with people from the local community. The participants' stories conveyed several signs of acculturation process, in terms of learning new features (Berry's cultural learning), feelings of belonging (Talib's psychological acculturation) and acceptance and understanding of cultural diversity in the changed cultural context (Talib's socio-cultural acculturation) (1992, 2004, in Korhonen 2010, 28-29). As previously stated in this study, understanding of cultural diversity relates to ethnorelativism, the relativity of practices and values among all cultures. Together with intercultural sensitivity, ethnorelativism forms the base of intercultural competence, the knowledge and skills which ease intercultural interaction (Bennett 1998 in Korhonen 2010, 25, Virkama 2010, 50). Ethnorelativism was also reflected in the participants' increased or changed understanding about different societal and cultural conditions.

As the participants perceived their sensitivity towards the relativity of their cultural knowledge increased, this intercultural sensitivity together with ethnorelativism theoretically should have brought forth the notion of intercultural competence in the participants' stories. The participants, however, specifically perceived not to have gained any culturally connected special knowledge or skills via their international voluntary work and even the word "intercultural sensitivity" itself was not used, though its essence was described. One reason for this can be that the participants' stay in another country was not sufficient enough in developing intercultural competence; as the participants perceived, they got insight into another culture. On the other hand, the participants' stories reflected the informal nature of the culturally connected learning experiences. Therefore for example intercultural sensitivity is something that is difficult to verbalize because it develops as tacit knowledge. This, alongside with

their apparent interconnectedness, also explains why many of the participants overall perceived it difficult to verbalize their learning experiences: cultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity and acceptance of (cultural) diversity are all interconnected, and develop via acculturation process, which is essentially socialization and social learning (Perheentupa 57-59 in Harju 2003, 73, Virkama 2010, 42). The findings of this study reflect learning in international voluntary work is a holistic process, which makes it difficult to put into words in terms of what the volunteers get from it. The findings also reflect international voluntary work is primarily informal learning experiences, and thus the findings on informal learning experiences dominate the other two themes.

The findings bring forth two interesting aspects relating to the understanding and acceptance of (cultural) diversity. Firstly, the participants perceived that though international voluntary work increased their acceptance of diversity, it did not really change it, as they were already accepting of diversity or tolerant. The findings also mildly imply that one reason the returned volunteers were already tolerant was that they had prior experience in living abroad, which further enforced the idea and motivation to participate in yet another international experience. Is it bad then, if already tolerant people participate to an activity which has as one of its aims to increase intercultural understanding and, particularly in the case of European Voluntary Service, tolerance? As implied in one of the quotes of the participants, it is somewhat unrealistic to expect people who would potentially fundamentally change their attitudes regarding (cultural) diversity to participate to international voluntary work; knowledge of intercultural nature is linked to its appreciation (Jokikokko 2005 in Korhonen 2010). From a perspective of an organization of which activities by definition are voluntary, the idea is surely not also to force international volunteering on people who do not care about intercultural encounters, even if one could argue in our contemporary globalized society they should. Moreover, despite of participation to international voluntary work increasing globally, the undersigned would claim there is no over-abundance of Finns volunteering abroad via Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland or any similar non-profit organisation. From this perspective, it does not need to be away from anyone if someone who already has international experience participates to an international voluntary work programme. Having volunteers of different ages and different backgrounds also fall under the concept of life-long, which emphasizes the individuality and life-lasting duration of one's learning in life (Harju 2002, 52). For this speaks also the findings of this thesis in which the participants, regardless of their age and prior experiences, perceived international voluntary work to impact their career development and enforce their self-confidence.

The second interesting aspect relating to the understanding and acceptance of (cultural) diversity indicated in the findings was that, when volunteers' understanding of different societal and cultural environments grew, so did their acceptance towards these differences and

their flaws. On a practical level this meant for example that if the volunteers faced aspects they felt should be improved in the hosting project, they did not bring these notions forward because they felt it was not their role to do so as an international volunteer. Moreover, the participants did not want to be involved in any kind of non-profit activities which put them in an expert or helper position. Does this mean, then, that having a (critical) discussion within the voluntary work placement about ideas for improvement means also an automatic assumption of an expert or a helper role? Is it not possible to have an equal and open discussion within the hosting community on the exchange of good practices, without having the feeling of disrespecting or devaluing someone or their work? Is it not, like one of the participants reflected, the little initiatives, little actions that matter?

The findings make one question the activities of the international volunteers, which becomes easy if excluding the element of a new social community and culture and their internalized values and practices (Perheentupa 57-59 in Harju 2003, 73). As some of the participants mentioned, the awareness of the impact societal and cultural conditions have on people made mutual understanding challenging. Based on this, it is possible not wanting speak out had less to do with will and more to do with a realistic notion of not being able to. Overall these findings make one question international voluntary work as active citizenship, when active citizenship is understood as awareness of one's influencing possibilities within one's respective communities and the active behaviour towards realizing those possibilities (Harju 2003). Moreover the findings emphasize these international voluntary work programmes as a pragmatic form of voluntary service; first and foremost come the learning experiences for the volunteer, any wider communal or societal benefit through these experiences is secondary. On the other hand this kind of statement is easy to make in a thesis where the focus has been throughout on the volunteers' experiences and perceptions; perhaps having interviewed the volunteering placements, the findings on international voluntary work's societal influence would be different.

Another aspect relating to active citizenship that came across in the findings was that the participants perceived their participation to similar third sector activities not to increase after their international voluntary work abroad, although international studies tend to indicate otherwise (Machin 2008, Lough et al 2009). Connected to the increase of participation to third sector activities after volunteering abroad is also the idea of returned volunteers using their social capital to advocate or coordinate resources for a cause in the hosting country (McBride et al 2010). Although some of the participants have continued with third sector activities after the international voluntary work via MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland, they perceived this to be mainly based on prior interests and involvement. Moreover, a couple of the participants perceived the international voluntary work period to even decrease their interest to get involved with similar activities, particularly related to the hosting country or placement. This

was considered to be due to negative experiences with people and the voluntary work placement, developing sceptical and even cynical attitudes. Overall the findings indicate that for volunteers to continue in or perceive positively third sector activities such as international volunteering, these activities have to be trustworthy and equal among its participants. Coupled with the notions in the previous paragraph, the findings also indicate without the relational element of social capital (trust, equality, communication), its structural element (the amount of social contacts) is not enough to further social change.

Even if continuing with third sector activities would not be the main aim of international voluntary work, lack of trust and cynicism do not speak highly for the quality of some of the social contacts the participants had during their overseas volunteering. Surely not all social encounters during international voluntary work can be expected to go perfectly and, probably, the higher the expectations, the bigger the disappointment. However, when it comes to the more facilitated contacts of international voluntary work, such as the host families and work communities, volunteers have a realistic expectation to assume there is, at least to some extent, interest and preparedness towards the international volunteer. In this study, all the participants staying in host families did not reminisce their stay in the host family positively, mainly because of experiencing the host families' lack of interest towards them. In addition, particularly the younger volunteers experienced difficulties in their initial work placement, including language barriers, lack of clear tasks and staff's low level of education and lack of guidance. Though these more negatively connoted remarks represented a minority in the overall findings, they are discussed here because they reveal a place for development within MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's activities. They are also discussed because the overall findings suggest international voluntary work has the potential to be a very positive experience.

According to Amorim & Geudens, "the satisfaction of a volunteer about the experiences and skills acquired remains incomplete without the sense of having effectively contributed towards a useful project for the local community" (2002, 15). This implies that even if the idea about an inexperienced Western youth wanting to make a societal impact in another country is somewhat of an oxymoron, volunteers have the right to expect to do some kind of sensible work. Costanzo & Hoffmann state that it is often this lack of sensible work which results in some volunteers leaving their placement after initiation (2002, 49). They go on to state that even more essential than the work is securing the whole framework in which the volunteer lives (2002, 50), such as housing and support from the local coordinating organisation. In order for the hosting project to be prepared for the international volunteer, training and established roles regarding the volunteer are recommended (Costanzo & Hoffmann 2002, 45-50). Pavlovova writes that it is the sending organization's responsibility to pair the right volunteer with the right project based on knowledge they have on both (regarding motives, expectations) pre-departure (2002, 19-22).

In MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland, the out-going volunteers' motivations and expectations are addressed in pre-departure trainings and peer interviews, where returned volunteers are included in conducting the interviews (MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland). According to MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's Secretary General Anni Koskela, in these meetings conversation on expectations from both volunteer and staff side are very open and candid (2012). The returned volunteers involved the peer interviews are also encouraged to very openly discuss their experiences of the voluntary work placement or hosting ICYE in order for the departing volunteers to have realistic expectations (Koskela 2012). Choosing the voluntary work project for the international volunteer, however, is strictly the hosting ICYE's task due to the division of work within ICYE on an international level (Koskela 2012); this differs from European Voluntary Service where application is more project than country-based. According to Costanzo & Hoffmann the hierarchy of having coordinating organizations in between the volunteer and the actual placement imposes some risks, because, even though the voluntary work's coordinators would be highly motivated to facilitate learning experiences, same does not necessarily apply to all those actually ending up working with the volunteer (2002, 45-50).

As the only way MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland can influence the pairing of the right volunteer with the right project and the training the hosting projects receive is via feedback to the coordinating organizations, the findings indicate that this communication with MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's international sister organizations need to be enforced. As the participants of this study perceived the voluntary work to be valuable when the hosting project had tools to familiarize them to the work, a particular part of this feedback can include a suggestion of pairing a young volunteer with a hosting project experienced in familiarizing volunteers to the work, a notion also supported by Hoffmann & Pavlovova (2002, 39). In addition, the findings indicate that MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland should continue with the already well-experienced activities of peer interviewing and pre-departure trainings, where future international volunteers are encouraged to openly and introspectively evaluate their expectations and motivations regarding international voluntary work. As much as these measures can support the volunteers' positive and safe international voluntary work experience, they do not exclude the volunteers' own roles in the formation of the overall volunteering experience.

Overall the findings, though they cannot be generalized, gave an insight into how returned volunteers experience and perceive their international voluntary work period and its effect on their life. This insight will be shared as an article via MaaIlmanVaihtoa - Volunteers' voices in its September 2012 issue, distributed to a host of people involved with MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland from volunteers to host families to voluntary work placements within Finland. Moreover, with applied methods, the contents of this thesis will be used as a training tool in MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's seminars by staffers and volunteers (Koskela 2012). Going beyond what the findings suggest for MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland's future activities, the

findings imply that the framework (location, work, accommodation, social life) and individual attributes (prior experiences, motivations, individual characteristics) have a significant role in shaping the volunteer's learning experiences and the international voluntary work's outcomes. This suggests that in addition to studying the connection between the two further, it is also worthwhile to study the hosting projects' and families' experiences about international volunteers.

7 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Constructivism and view on reality as a social construction raises criticism towards the reliability of qualitative research when objectivity and a certain distance from the studied phenomenon is seen as a prerequisite for a reliable research, as with positivist research orientation (Toulmin 1998 in Heikkinen 2010). Heikkinen states that objectivity in postmodern research is "an illusion" because knowledge is always contextual, tied to a specific time and environment (2010, 146). Following this idea, a qualitative research cannot be checked for reliability by repeating the study, for findings will alter somehow as time has passed and people and situations will have changed.

Because reliability is a problematic concept for qualitative research, social scientists speak of trustworthiness. When findings of a research are contextually formed as a result of a fluctuating process, the trustworthiness of a qualitative study is its credibility and rigor, its readers' belief that what they read is valid (Kiviniemi 2010, 83, Heikkinen 2010, 153, Rossmann & Rallis 2012, 59). According to Kiviniemi (2010, 81-83) and Rossmann & Rallis (2012, 59-60), this is best achieved by transparent explanation of the study's outlining and its (possible) changes throughout the research process. Therefore trustworthiness, even if it would be separated in the thesis report, is a part of the study design. It is important to note also concerning this study that much of what is discussed in this chapter has already been taken into consideration before conducting the field research. Rossmann & Rallis also point out that ethical considerations, such as avoiding harm to participants, are an integral part of a study's trustworthiness, thus they should not be separated in discussion (2012, 60). This chapter focuses on discussing the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of this study, particularly from the perspective of the study design choices.

The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions of returned volunteers of Maailmanvaihto - ICYE Finland on the impact international voluntary work has had on their lives. As the interest was in perceptions and experiences, qualitative methods were chosen for the study. The outset of this study was that learning experiences of intercultural nature take time to form in a person's life story, so it was better to focus the study on participants whose in-

ternational voluntary work period dates some years back instead of recently returned volunteers. Based on this returned volunteers from 2007 were chosen as a focus group.

By focusing the study on a singular year of volunteers made the sampling of the study purposeful, however offering the possibility to participate to all the volunteers of said year made the sampling more random. This created some weaknesses and risks, one of those risks being that more volunteers than can or should be interviewed would have volunteered for this small-scale study. This risk was throughout considered small by both the working-life partner and the undersigned, rather that it might have proven challenging to find enough participants due to the experience losing relevance with several years having passed (in which case the sampling would have been extended to other year/s of returned volunteers). To have had ultimately ended up with six participants was considered positively surprising.

The sampling can also be further critiqued for its randomness, which is more a characteristic of quantitative than qualitative research. Ideally maximum variation, where as diverse as possible respondents are chosen based on already known attributes to illuminate the core commonalities (Patton 2002, 234-235), is used as a sampling method in qualitative research. This however was not seen as a viable option for this study because of the confidentiality of the volunteers' application, background and contact information. To contact the returned volunteers beforehand via MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland to ask for permission to retrieve their personal information, only after which to contact them again if they fitted the maximum variation sampling, was mutually agreed with the working-life partner to be too complicated, time-consuming and counteractive, putting the volunteers off before the study even begun. For MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland to select the participants was also considered briefly, however that approach was disregarded as it was mutually agreed that a certain distance from the working-life partner would better serve the trustworthiness of the study. By using maximum variation or any similar sampling method where participants are chosen based on already known attributes, the more critical cases of this thesis would not have likely come forth. Critical cases are, also in this study, relevant to the development of knowledge (Patton 2002, 236), and ultimately it was the randomness of the sampling which guaranteed its variation and credibility.

Interviews with a narrative emphasis were chosen as a data collection method for the study. The reasoning behind was that in order for the participants to reflect on the impact and changes international voluntary work has brought on to their lives, they must also reflect the actual volunteering period as well as what led them to participate to it in the first place. This choice was validated by a test interview in summer 2011, prior to which an even more unstructured interview type was considered. Additional questions based on the international

voluntary work programmes' aims were also prepared as a "back-up plan" for the interviews, as the narrative interview method was considered to be somewhat challenging.

Using additional questions not originating from the interviews to an extent goes against the naturalistic paradigm of this study and could be considered hypotheses testing. For this purpose the idea of a very thoroughly established theoretical framework prior to collecting the field data was also initially frowned upon by the undersigned. On one hand it increases pre-conceptions about the studied phenomenon and with it the risk of imposing ideas to the participants' stories, both during the data collection and analysis. On the other hand, as the interviewees are allowed speak freely and the data formation is less controlled, there is also a risk of the findings having next to nothing to do with the already introduced theoretical concepts. However, although qualitative research's aim is not to test hypotheses, it is not free of them (Kiviniemi 2010, 74). Reviewing theme-related literature and especially previous studies is a part of thesis ethics (Laurea Ethics Board 2007), so it would have been dishonest to pretend that such previous studies, articles and concepts do not exist. In addition, preconceptions would have existed regardless in this study due to the author's personal affiliation to the study topic. As previously mentioned in the study design, the additional questions ultimately came to aid in the interviews. Ultimately they also had little impact on the final findings, as in most of the interviews the themes came up naturally from the participants' stories. In fact, the only findings which relate to the additional questions are the ones which participants did not experience as their international voluntary work period's outcomes; (the lack of increase in) active citizenship, independence and tolerance.

Partly due to the additional questions, the interviews came out very differently. Some followed a very narrative structure, where altogether fewer questions were asked, others came out more fractured. As the atmosphere in the interviews was overall non-formal and relaxed, the differences between the interviews implied differences between the participants in terms of introspectiveness and preparedness, despite of receiving information about the interview method beforehand. On the other hand, the topic of the thesis was demanding; it has been already established that informal learning experiences are by default difficult to verbalize. Considering the original focus of the study, where the most relevant data for the research question comes at the latter part of the interview, the time was also not enough to go in-depth as one hour seemed to be the limit of concentration for both the interviewee and the interviewer. This was not taken enough into consideration beforehand and probably also due to this the interview data was strongly on the volunteering period, not its outcomes.

To have the interview data strongly on the volunteering period needed not be a problem, as long as its relation to the life afterwards was established to the extent to which such a connection existed. These connections, though existing from the author's point of view, were not

ultimately always made. This was partly due to the student interviewer's personal background, which increased at times presumptions about understanding for example how a participant's voluntary work related to their present employment, only realizing afterwards no such conclusions were actually verbalized by the participant; a relevant notion in a study which focuses on participants', not the author's, perceptions. In addition, due to the fear of allowing this personal background to influence and taint the interview data, the interviewer did not also actively enough make suggestive questions, which for example in the case of the above-mentioned employment-example would have most probably led to slightly different findings in the "work experience and career development" theme. In this regard the element of dialogue in a qualitative interview was forgotten. As Hatch and Wisniewski write, in a narrative interview the interviewee and interviewer reach "a common, inter-subjective understanding" (1995 in Heikkinen 2010, 155), so making mildly suggestive questions, also from a social constructivist paradigm, would have been entirely acceptable. From retrospect it is easy to say that the author's prior knowledge about the study theme was an extent a hindrance in the interviews. In addition, at least one more test interview should have been conducted and the interviews should have taken place more far apart from one another, in order to further develop the kind of interviewing skills required for a narrative interview.

All in all due to the different aspects noted in the previous two paragraphs, the data and findings concerning the original research question came out less contextual than originally intended or expected. This added reason to include the second research question concerning the actual voluntary work period to this study. These kinds of changes during the course of a research are characteristic for qualitative research (Kiviniemi 2010, 75-76) and instead of being an ethical violation, moreover supported the aims of this study in providing MaaIlmanvaihto - ICYE Finland information about their activities and giving the returned volunteers voice. For the latter reason the author still stands by choosing a more unstructured interview method, as it enabled the participants very freely to discuss the aspects they wanted and to have moments of empowerment, although in retrospect it feels naïve to have chosen a data collection method which inevitably results in vast amount of data for only one, focused research question. From this perspective it can be also questioned why a third research question covering motives was not included in this study and how such an inclusion would have changed the findings. However, as Kiviniemi states a qualitative research must have delimitations (2010, 73), and in this study motives was one of them already in the theoretical framework. As mentioned previously in this study, the extent to which the volunteer motivations were relevant for the outcomes came already sufficiently enough across in the final finding themes.

The data analysis of this study can be further critiqued from what is previously mentioned. Firstly, it can be critiqued for how it is presented, considering many student researchers using

content analysis opt to include a framework of sorts in how they came to arrive to the final themes of the findings. In this study, providing such visual examples would give a false idea of the non-linear and messy process the data analysis of this study was; Patton even states that qualitative data analysis is often so creative that despite of its technical approaches, it ought not to be followed mechanically (2002). The interviews were read through and cross-analyzed several times for convergence and divergence, for induction and deduction, even before they were re-written in their new narrative forms and even after the new research question was added. This going back and forth between the data was an ever-present aspect of the data analysis, so a clear guide as to how the final findings were formed simply cannot be provided.

Secondly, the data analysis can be critiqued for the use of content analysis. In a narrative research, content analysis is considered a less compatible data analysis method by various authors (e.g. Kohler Riessmann 1993, 3, Polkinghorne 1995 in Heikkinen 2010). This is based on the idea that as narratives are stories, they also follow the structure of stories and have a starting point, a middle part and an ending; a plot. Therefore, to analyze narratives for content and categories is to “snippet” the story out of its context and “butcher” the data (Kohler Riessmann 1993, 3). In this study, the participants’ stories were so individual and greatly varied, that it would have been impossible to combine them into one or even two stories. Content analysis was specifically chosen for this study as it enabled to take into account possible patterns and processes in the narrations, however also allowing to present the findings in a more easily understandable and readable form; for this purpose divergence was also an important part of the data analysis, as delimiting details, albeit them being interesting to the author, was important to secure defragmentation of the final themes (Kiviniemi 2010, 80). To have represented the participants’ stories in rewritten form would have also ultimately included enough contexts to reveal their identity, so it would have not protected the participants’ confidentiality. This was an important notion in a study where the working-life partner is a relatively small organisation and the participants are already a part of a selected focus group. For this reason special attention was also paid to the quotes used to illuminate the central findings, for which all of the participants gave permission, and some of the quotes were modified to conceal possible revealing attributes, yet without losing their central message.

The previous paragraph touches already an important aspect of ethical approach to research: avoiding harm to its participants. According to Laurea University of Applied Sciences Ethical Board, the participants of a study have the right to have their data treated confidentially (2007). They also have the right to receive information about the study, in terms of its purpose and chosen methods (Laurea University of Applied Sciences Ethical Board 2007). As explained in the study design, in this study the participants were given information about the study first in the introduction letter, later on when agreeing the interviews and in the inter-

views. The participants were told about the purpose of the study, the interview method, the confidential treatment of the data, its destruction after publishing the study and the possibility to leave the study at any given moment. Based on individual participants' interests, information given about the study was either briefly informative or more elaborate.

From an outsider's standpoint to this study, it could be said that not enough of the information the participants received is documented; the introduction letter (Appendix 1) does not for example reveal the possible publication of an article in *MaaIlmanVaihtoa - Volunteers' voices* was discussed with the participants and the informed consent (Appendix 2) does not reveal participants gave their permission to use quotations. This lack of documentation can be critiqued, especially when this thesis was done by a singular student. On the other hand, it would have been impossible to include as appendices all the correspondence with the participants without revealing recognizable information about them, so it was decided to incorporate the few essential lines related to the interview method in the Data collection chapter, not as a separate appendix. Moreover, based on personal experience as a participant in studies, there was awareness that the written informed consent in itself is not a guarantee of the confidential and ethical treatment of the data. In this study, this confidential and ethical treatment was first and foremost based on mutual trust, in which the written informed consent was a formality. For this purpose, participant validation was important and the possibility for the participants to view the findings prior publication was very much advocated to them. Ultimately the final findings were sent to four of the six participants with whom viewing of the findings was previously agreed.

One of the most essential aspects to discuss concerning the trustworthiness of this thesis is the student researcher's international volunteering background. Though in the past years this involvement has been fairly non-existent, it is fair to say that tacit knowledge and internalized views about international volunteering have been developed during the course of years. Due to these internalized views, prior experience was at times a hindrance (e.g. previously stated comments on data collection) and at times an asset (e.g. intuition on relevant resources among the mass of resources on volunteering). From the author's perspective, the most important role this background played was prolonging the thesis process. When knowledge is socially constructed and one's look on reality is inevitably subjective (Babbie 2002, 34-35), continuous self-reflection became an essential part of this study. This was ensured by continuous questioning from thesis supervisors in the beginning of this study and the author's motivation in doing a trustworthy thesis, in which personal views do not taint the field research. One can question were these measures enough, and it is easy to say having done this thesis with another student, with an additional "interpretive prism" throughout this thesis process, would have added to the trustworthiness of this thesis. Aspects which speak for succeeding in making a trustworthy and credible thesis, however, are the working life partner's

future plans in using this thesis and participant validation which went beyond remaining as a participant in the study. This thesis has been moreover subject to interest and positive reinforcement from others involved with international volunteering during this thesis process. These aspects speak for the validity of making a Bachelor's thesis on international voluntary work, for it is valuable to those involved in it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: INFORMATION LETTER

Hei kansainväliseen vapaaehtoistyöhön osallistunut!

Olen Laurean ammattikorkeakoulun sosiaalialan opiskelija ja tekemässä opinnäytetyötä kansainvälisestä vapaaehtoistyöstä Maailemanvaihdolle Euroopan vapaaehtoistoiminnan vuonna 2011. Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on kartuttaa tietoa kansainvälisestä vapaaehtoistyöstä vapaaehtoisten näkökulmasta käsin. Jos siis olet osallistunut kansainväliseen vapaaehtoistyöhön ulkomailla ICYE- tai EVS -vapaaehtoisohjelman kautta, olen kiinnostunut kuulemaan kokemuksistasi ja näkemyksistäsi!

Opinnäytetyöni on alemman ammattikorkeakoulututkinnon (sosionomi amk) opinnäytetyö, jonka painopiste on kansainvälisen vapaaehtoistyön vaikutuksissa ja vapaaehtoistyöjakson jälkeisessä ajassa. Siten erityisen kiinnostuksen kohteena ovat vapaaehtoiset, joiden vapaaehtoistyöjaksosta on jo vierähtänyt aikaa. Opinnäytetyön tutkimusosuus on tarkoitus toteuttaa yksilöhaastatteluina pääkaupunkiseudulla loka-marraskuussa 2011. Haastattelumateriaalia kohdellaan luottamuksellisesti ja henkilötietoja paljastamatta.

Jos olet kiinnostunut osallistumaan haastatteluihin tai haluat tutkimuksesta lisäinfoa, toivon Sinun olevan suoraan yhteydessä minuun. Jos haastattelujen paikka (pääkaupunkiseutu) tai ajankohta syystä tai toisesta ovat Sinulle osallistumisen esteenä, ole silti minuun yhteydessä - mielipiteesi ja kokemuksesi ovat arvokasta tutkimusmateriaalia!

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Kaisa Palonen
kaisa.palonen@laurea.fi
Puh: 050 XXX XXXX

Appendix 2: INFORMED CONSENT

Minä, _____, suostun osallistumaan tutkimukseen kansainvälisten vapaaehtoistyöntekijöiden kokemuksista. Annan luvan käyttää haastattelussa antamani tieto- ja tutkimukseen, joka on osa Laurean ammattikorkeakoulun sosionomitutkinnon opinnäytetyötä. Olen tietoinen siitä, että opinnäytetyössä, niin aineiston keruussa kuin analysoinnissa, sovelletaan tutkimuseettisiä periaatteita, kuten totuudellisuutta ja vaitiolovelvollisuutta. Käytännössä tämä tarkoittaa sitä, että henkilöllisyyteni ei tule tutkimuksen missään vaiheessa ilmi ja kaikki haastattelumateriaalit (nauhat, muistiinpanot) tuhotaan tutkimuksen jälkeen. Salassapitovelvollisuus säilyy opinnäytetyön julkaisun jälkeen.

Olen myös tietoinen, että osallistumiseni tutkimukseen on vapaaehtoista ja voin kieltäytyä antamani aineiston julkaisemisesta missä tahansa tutkimuksen vaiheessa. Minulla on myös oikeus nähdä valmis aineisto ennen sen julkaisua.

paikka	aika	tutkimukseen osallistuvan allekirjoitus
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Appendix 3: ORIGINAL QUOTES IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

"Ja enkä mä tietenkään, se oli niitten systeemi ja, ja ne oli sillä lailla tehny sitä [huoahtaa] vaikka kuinka kauan, ja enhän mä mikään, enhän mä ensinnäkään pystyny kommunikimaan kauheen hyvin niitten kanssa ja toiseks eihän mulla ollu silleen kauheen, mulla ei ollu siellä vaikutusmahdollisuuksia paljo ollenkaan, tietenki ku mä olin, ku ne ois halunnu tietenki et mä olisin käyttäny samoja [ruumiillisen rangaistuksen] metodeja, ja siitä mä kieltäydyin tietenkin, mutta ei mulla ollu mahdollista niihin mitenkään vaikuttaa ja mä koin sen näin ja se oli kyl, se oli kyl tosi vaikeeta se että, tavallaan, siellä olin mutta ei, ei pystyny mitenkään, öhm..niinku vaikuttamaan tai, tai ehm...tai niinku tekemään mitään järkevää tavallaan koska se tapahtu niinku niissä raameissa, öhm, ja niistä ei niinku oikein pystyny pääsemään pois---"

"...sä sait niin vapaat kädet kaikis projekteissa melkein, et mä oisin voinnu keksii siis ihan mitä tahansa, ja sit mä oisin voinnu tehdä jotain...ehkä tuli se ikä vähä niinku vastaan et mä olin niin nuori et emmä, emmä niinku uskaltanu, et se oli ensimmäist kertaa ku mä olin itse niinku matkoilla et en mä ollu sillee muutenkaa paljo matkustanu ennen, niin, et emmä osannu vaan, mul ei ollu sitä alotekeykyä tarpeeks, siinä tuntu ittesä niin turhaks jotenki siellä, et, et tota...ja se oli kyl siis hieno kokemus, se oli vaa jotenki erilainen ku mä luulin et mä lähin sinne tekeen jotain tarpeellista työtä ja sitähan mä en sitte tehny."

"...loppujen lopuks voidaan ehkä rehellisesti sanoa että mä en oikeestaan tehny siel töitä...se oli just niinku ehkä molemminpuolista, että niil oli hirvee kiire ja paljon, ne oli ottanu paljon vapaaehtosia, joista monel, monellakaan ei ollu töitä, ja me tulkittiin se niin että ne teki sitä sen takia et ne sai rahaa. Ja toisaalta mä sitte varmaanki aika nopeesti tulin siihen tulokseen että no hei, et, mä oon aivan uudessa maailman kolkassa ja tääl on paljon ihania ihmisiä toisaalta, mä en oo koskaan ollu täällä ja täält pääsee matkustamaan niin että life is good..."

"---emmä tienny mitään (...) tai niinku, öhm, minkälaista (...) työ on siinä vaiheessa, mutta sitä kauttahan mä sain semmosen, öhm, sain, öö, nähä sitä ja kokea sitä ja sit se tuntu vaan enemmän ja enemmän kiinnostavalta ja mä olin varma siitä et sitä mä haluan tehdä ja se tuntu semmoselt tosi arvokkaalta kokemukselta, öhm, öhm, niinku ottaen huomioon et jos mä halusin niinku tehdä sitä työtä myöhemmin niin se tuntu sit tosi semmoselta hyvältä tavalta niinku oppia siitä käytännön työstä...ja siitä mä olin kyllä tietonen että, eihän niinku Pohjoismaissa koskaan päästä semmoseen, niinku, ennen ku on, on, opiskellu vuosia yliopistolla---"

"---muuten mä en niinku ollu ollu (...) kanssa tekemisissä, mutta totta kai se että mä olin just ollu (...) kanssa niinku tekemisissä niin tota, totta kai se vaikutti siihen että hain sitten niinkun (...) töitä et se oli hyvin luonnollista...sillä lailla se just se vapaaehtoistyöjakso vaikutti tulevaisuuteen että hakeuduin (...) töihin ja tosiaan nyt viidettä vuotta siellä sitten niinku keikkalaisena...ja kun sen näkee mun CV:ssa, niin kyllä kaikki alan ihmiset tietää että, tietää että mikä se paikka on, ja niinkun, mä uskon et siit tulee olemaan hyötyä, se et siitä on ollu just tän, tän koulupaikan saamisen kannalta, ja mä uskon kyl et siitä...että, siit on ollu suunnattomasti hyötyä, plus että se itse työ on opettanu mulle niin paljon---"

"---ku ollaan pienessä yhteisössä ja niin tiiviisti, ja kaikille on uutta ja ihmeellistä ja kaikkia jännittää, niin siinä jotenkin, siinä niist ihmisistä tulee jotenkin varmaan jollain lailla vielä tärkeempiä, tai, tai uskon niin et tulee semmossia niinku tärkeempiä ja läheisempiä...siellä niinku sitoutuu niihin ihmisiin ja, tulee just semmossia ystävyyssuhteita ja paljon lähempiä ja paljon tiukempia kun, kun mitä esimerkiksi Suomessa jonkun koulukavereitten kanssa eihän ne oo niinkun yhtään samanlaisia, niinkun yhtä syvällisiä, silleen."

"...joku semmonen kuviteltu yhteys ihmisiin, se oli ehkä se, että semmonen jutustelu, mitä tuntuu et siihen ei o olevinaan aikaa, ja se että siel tapahtu kanssakäyminen hyvin paljon kasvotusten."

"...pääasiassa oon tehny ihan järkeviä ystäviä mutta sitte on muutamia (...) et on niinku alusta asti niinku tarrautunu minuu ja tai tähän länsimaiseen niinku, et ku tuntee yhen länsimaisen nii tämä auttaa...et 'auta mua saamaan opiskelupaikka, auta mua pääseen Suomeen töihin, auta mua'...ihan kaikkee mahdollista."

”...sen verran ku aikaa viettää siellä niinku pääsee semmoseen niinku niihin koodeihin eri lailla sisälle ja ymmärtää niitä...yritti niin paljo ku mahdollista myös sitte kuitenkin ku huomasi sen että mitkä asiat on, sitä niinku, niinku oman kokemuksen kautta, että mitkä asiat on, mitä asiaa suvaitaan ja mitä ei ja niitä sitte tietenkin vähän joutu karsimaan tai, tai siihen niinku, niinku tosi konkreettisesti kokee sen että, että mikä on mahdollista ja mikä ei, ei o mahollista siinä kulttuurista koska se rajottaa myös itseään...jos oikeesti haluaa, haluaa johonkin kulttuuriin sisälle sillä lailla niin viettää pidemmän aikaa ja niinku, osallistuu semmoseen yhteisöön et josta saa tavallaan sisäänkäynnin siihen kulttuuriin, öhm, ihan varmasti.”

”...mitä enemmän oppi sitä kieltä niin sitä enemmän vielä koki, koki niinku että, että aa, että kappas että tää torin myyjä ei yrittänykkään huijata multa rahaa tällä viikolla että se on opinu että [naurahtaen], että niinku, niinku näin ja sitten, sit mulle tuli hirveen tärkeeks, tai mä muistan kokeneeni hirveen tärkeenä sen että, esimerkiksi joku lähikaupan nainen, ku se tuli mua kadulla vastaan niin se tervehti mua ja mä muistan, muistan sen että siitä tuli niinku tosi hyvä fiilis, sillee et ku sä kävelet kadulla ja siel on tuttuja, siel on tuttuja jotka tervehtii sua...mä muistan et niinku et, et, tunsin kuuluvani kyllä sinne...”

”...ensimmäiset kuukaudet oli aika vaikeita, niinku jos vielä palataan sen verran taaksepäin siihen et, et se niinku kulttuuriin sopeutuminen, vieras kieli ja kaikki se uus niin se oli kyllä niinku silleen tietyllä tavalla aika rankka ja mä olin yhdessä vaiheessa niinkun, olin kyllä vasti sitä mieltä, että tää on kuukaudessa nähty, minä palaan takasin Suomeen [naurahtaa] mutta tota, onneks en sitte palannu...sit mä en enää halunnu lähtee, et mä olin ollu siellä sen (...), ja silloin mä olin jo sopeutunu sinne sen verran että mä en niinku, et mä koin niinku että mul on kaikki työt kesken ja, et emmä nyt lähe mihinkään...”

”...vaikka kuitenkin viettää sen verran aikaa nii se on kuitenkin niin pieni osa, vielä silloinkin se on ihan semmonen pikkuruinen osa sitä että mitä, mitä niinku ymmärtäminen mitä se on ja se on niinku, siellä sitte tavallaan selviää kans se että miten, miten valtavasti on oppimista...”

”...kulttuurienvälinen kompetenssi on vaan niin semmonen ameebamainen käsite että ku se tarkoittaa eri asiaa eri ihmisille ja missä vaiheessa mä voin sanoa et mä oon kompetentti jos-sain, tai että, et emmä voi sanoa että mä oon ollu (...) niin nyt ku mä meen (...) niin mä solahdan ku kala veteen, kaikki toi, toi on ihan bullshittia, että jos joku väittää että, tää on tää kaikkien alojen suvereeni asiantuntija, ja se et mä oon ollu (...) niin mä en välttämättä tiedä miten toisella puolella maata toimitaan, et jotenki, et se on niinku ehkä sellanen asia, mikä on osittain ehkä myös (...) jalostunu, että on vähän varovaisempi sen suhteen, että miten, ku tekee statementtejä, niin miten asiat on.”

”...esimerkiksi asiat jotka mä luulin että on enemmän universaaleja, että semmoset arvot jotka mä luulin että kaikki, kaikki voi samaistua niihin jollaki tavalla tai ainaki, ei ehkä kaikki mut ihmiset kaikkialla, mutta jotkut ihmiset kaikkialla voi samaistua niihin, nii se ei välttämättä [huoahdaen] pidä paikkansa, että mä ymmärsin jotenki enemmän sen että miten, miten erilaiset suhteet vaikuttaa niihin, ku ne konkreettiset suhteet, niinku yhteiskunnallisetkin ja ihan fyysisetki olosuhteet miten ne vaikuttaa semmoseen niinku ihmisten maailmankatsomukseen ja niitten jotenki, psykkeenki, suoraan, et, et on kuitenkin sitä erilaisuutta...”

”Sitä helposti ajattelee olevansa niinku ihan über-suvaitsevainen kun on ollu jossain muualla kun Suomessa mutta näinhän se ei aukottomasti varmaan koskaan ole, ja kyl sielläkin varmaan koskaan tuli sellasia kokemuksia että, koki ymmärtävänsä paremmin joittenkin ihmisten erilaisista tapaa toimia ja, mm, että miksei. Toisaalta mä en usko että sellaset ihmiset jotka ois lähtökohtaisesti hirveen nurkkakuntasia jopa rasisteja niin mä luulen et semmoset jotka eniten sitä tarvis niin semmoset ei sinne hakeutuis valitettavasti...”

”...valitettavasti se on myös muuttanu niinku huonol tavalla, must on tullu aika semmonen kyyninen niinku...kylhän mä huomaan sen niinku et...mä oon niinku hirveen idealistinen ihminen muutenkin...mä huomaan että maailma ei oo niin täydellinen ku mä uskoin silloin, sit kuitenkin ku on eläny niin suomalaises kuplassa niinku, sit, tuleeki niinku, vähä ulos maailmalle, et onks se nyt Euroopassa tai jossakin kauempana, ja huomaa että kaikki ei ookaan niin hy-

vin, ja tota, jahas, ku ihmisiä ei kiinnostakaan niin hirveesti, niin ehkä se oli se joka oli vaikeeta mulle, siis niin nuorena kokee se...”

”mulla oli kaikkia niitä ongelmia [siellä]...niin tavallaan siin oli se hyvä puoli että mä jouduin ottamaan hirveesti vastuuta itse lopulta, ja totaa, ja mä en niinku voinnu olla silleen että kaikki tässä on sulle tarjottimella valmiina...koska sitte ku mul ei ollu mitään järjestöä takana niin sitten menin sinne itekseni. Ja mul oli tavallaan jo, mä en ollu niin epävarma, niin tiesin suurin piirtein miten mä voin edetä ja miten homma hoituu...”

”...ehkä se on jotenki hyvin niinku inhimillist tai siten ihminen toimii et ehkä ne tärkeimmät opit on sellasii jotka ei oo välttämättä verbalisoitavissa, tai et se on niinku ollu se tunne, just se kokemus mikä on ollu silloin hyvin semmonen vapautunu ja levollinen ja positiivinen... tuntuu että se mitä siitä saa on hyvin jotenkin intangible, jotenkin hyvin abstraktia, tää on just niit kokemuksia, elämyksiä...mut toisaalt et miks ei vois niinku sitäki kautta tulla sitä solitaa että, ehkä se on sit se oma ajatusvinksahdus, et sen vaan assosioi siihen et pitäs olla niinku sit tosi efektiä ja mitä tahansa, saada jotain tosi konkreettista aikaan siinä ajassa, no hei, hello.”

”...se on oikeesti ollu niin iso kokemus...ja sit niin tärkeä ja niin semmonen kasvattava ja kai-kin puolin niinku, ihan niinku välttämätön tuntuu nytte tai tuntuu et mä en ois koskaan halunu, koskaan haluais olla niinku, ilman sitä...musta on semmonen tärkeetä että se tiedetään ja että se tiedostetaan mitä se voi tehdä.”

